## Cultivating Missional Ecclesiology for the Local Baptist Church in Lebanon

Haddad, Elie

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# CULTIVATING MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE LOCAL BAPTIST CHURCH IN LEBANON

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door

Elie Haddad

geboren te Sidon, Libanon

promotor: prof.dr. B.J.G. Reitsma
copromotor: dr. P.R. Parushev

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# Abstract

**CULTIVATING MISSIONAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE LOCAL BAPTIST CHURCH IN LEBANON**

This dissertation is a study into the missional impulse of the Lebanese Baptist Church. This is accomplished through field research, through case studies, and through an assessment of how the Lebanese crises of the last ten years, as well as theological education, have helped shape the Lebanese Baptist Church. In order to do that, I use a body of missional church literature as a theological tool for conversation with the Lebanese Baptist Church. This body of literature comes out of the Missional Church movement of the Gospel and Our Culture Network in addition to other authors that extended that initial conversation.

My approach to this study is autoethnographic. I have been part of the Lebanese Baptist Church for most of its young life. My lived experience growing up in this Baptist community and now one of its leaders for the last fifteen years, gives me an understanding and insight into the inner workings of the Lebanese Baptist Church. I have also been exposed to a missional church framework in Canada and in Lebanon, academically, in church life, in corporate life, and in seminary life.

I am passionate about the Church in Lebanon, and I am passionate about *missio Dei*, God's mission in the world. My ultimate passion is to witness a Lebanese Baptist Church with an effective missional witness among its neighbors. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to offer a theological framework for the Lebanese Baptist Church to consider as it revisits its ecclesiology to match its evolving praxis.

# Samenvatting

**MISSIONAIRE ECCLESIOLOGIE VRUCHTBAAR MAKEN VOOR DE LOCALE BAPTISTENKERK IN LIBANON**

Deze dissertatie is een onderzoek naar de missionaire impuls van de Lebanese Baptist Church. Dit wordt bewerkstelligd door veldonderzoek, case studies en door een evaluatie van de vraag hoe enerzijds de verschillende crises van de laatste tien jaar en anderzijds het theologische onderzoek de Lebanese Baptist Church mede gevormd hebben. Om die analyse te kunnen maken gebruik ik literatuur over de 'missional church' als theologisch instrument voor het gesprek met de Lebanese Baptist Church. Deze literatuur is met name afkomstig uit de 'Missional Church Movement' van het *Gospel and Our Culture Network.* Daarbij wordt uiteraard ook gebruik gemaakt van andere auteurs die op die basis vervolgstappen hebben gezet.

Mijn aanpak in dit onderzoek is auto-etnografisch. Ik ben voor het langste deel van haar korte bestaan lid geweest van de Lebanese Baptist Church. De ervaring van het opgroeien in deze Baptistengemeenschap, waarvan ik inmiddels meer dan vijftien jaar een van de leiders ben, geeft me begrip voor en inzicht in het inwendige functioneren van de Lebanese Baptist Church. Met het 'missional church' gedachtegoed ben ik zowel in Canada als in Libanon op vele manieren in aanraking geweest: academisch, in het kerkelijke en maatschappelijke leven en binnen de context van het seminarie.

De kerk in Libanon heeft mijn hart. Datzelfde geldt voor de *missio Dei*, God's missie in de wereld. Mijn ultieme passie is een Lebanese Baptist Church te zien met een effectief missionair getuigenis naar de mensen rondom de kerk. Tegen die achtergrond is het doel van dit onderzoek een theologisch raamwerk te bieden aan de

Lebanese Baptist Church wanneer ze haar ecclesiologie heroverweegt in het licht van de ontstane praktijken.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

The first few Baptist churches in Lebanon were planted in the mid-twentieth century with the help of American Southern Baptist[1] missionaries[2]. The structure and form of these newly founded churches highly resembled those of the home churches of the missionaries. While in the mid-twentieth century Southern Baptist churches in North America enjoyed high attendance and may have been effective in their context with their attractive buildings and programs, this is no longer the case today. People then, during the Christendom era[3], naturally went to church on Sundays. In the 1950s, however, two major shifts occurred, from Christendom to post-Christendom and from modernity to post-modernity.[4] This has contributed to a big decline in church attendance that started in the 1960s "and continues unabated in most cases to the present time."[5] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger describe how the majority of church practices today are cultural adaptations to a society that no longer exists.[6] People today are no longer happy with modern churches.[7] The bigger the church building and the better the programs no longer means that people are naturally going to church on Sundays in the West today. For a church to be relevant and effective in a Western

[1] The Southern Baptist Convention is a Baptist denomination in the United States, founded in 1845 and today has more than 42,000 member churches. Their web site is: www.sbc.net.

[2] The roots of Baptist ministry in Lebanon go back to the 1890s when the first Lebanese Baptist came to faith in St. Louis, Missiouri, and was later ordained in Lebanon as the first Baptist minister in Lebanon. More on Sa'id Jraydīny below. However, the Baptist movement in Lebanon gained momentum in the mid- twentieth century as a direct result of the work and ministry of Southern Baptist missionaries. For a detailed history of Lebanese Baptists, consult

Pierre Francis, 2000 - 1895 تاريخ الكنائس المعمدانية في لبنان: تراث مسيحي أصيل في فسيفساء لبنان [History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Genuine Christian Heritage in a Diverse Lebanon 1895-2000] (Beirut: Dar Manhal Al Hayat, 2015); Melanie Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon: Baptists, Missions, and the Question of Cultures* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016).

[3] Christendom era as "the realm or time when Christianity was the assumed religion of the West", as described by Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting a Church That's Biblically Sound and Reaching People in Culture* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 19.

[4] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 17.

[5] Ibid., 19.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 21.

context in the present day, different models of church engagement are being explored. The Christendom modern church model that may have been effective in the West in the 1950s was never effective in Lebanon. There was no "Christendom" in Lebanon, although some elements of religious life and power dynamics resembled that of Christendom.[8] It had always been a multi-faith pluralistic culture. Constructing a church building, with a cross at the top, and developing good internal programming did not attract crowds from different religions.

The work of the Baptist churches in Lebanon, even with the assistance of the Western missionaries – who initially came to evangelize Muslims, was not effective among the majority Muslim context. Melanie Trexler comments that "despite an increased number of missionary personnel, Baptist churches, … very few SBC missionaries engaged Muslims in evangelism, and even fewer Muslim converts joined Baptist churches."[9] Trexler attributes that outcome to the evangelism approach. "By identifying Muslims as the target, missionaries denied Muslims their human dignity and freedom to choose a religion to practice."[10] George Sabra contends that missionary work in Lebanon in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was started to reach Muslims. However, they found that this was extremely difficult, so they resorted instead to "awaken and revive already existing Eastern churches,"[11] as was frequently the case with Western missions to the Middle East.[12] In addition, Lebanese

[8] It is worthy to note that Muslim's traditional understanding of Christendom in Lebanon is highly connected with the crusades, cf. Heidi Hirvonen, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Perspectives of Four Lebanese Thinkers* (Brill, 2012), 66.

[9] Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon*, 109.

[10] Ibid., 110.

[11] George Sabra, "Christian Mission in the Wake of the Arab Spring," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 3 (2014): 117.

[12] Eleanor Harvey Tejirian and Reeva S. Simon, *Conflict, Conquest, and Conversion: Two Thousand Years of Christian Missions in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 139.

Baptists at the time perceived themselves as a "double minority,"[13] a minority within a minority. Consequently, they avoided any outreach methods that might jeopardize the stability of the Lebanese Baptists. They "recognized that evangelizing Muslims could bring about severe repercussions if they achieved their goal."[14] The focus of the ministry of the Baptist churches became the protection of the identity and autonomy of the local church, not outreach.

Furthermore, the Baptist churches in Lebanon at the turn of the twenty-first century experienced significant decline in numbers since their prime between the 1950s and the start of the civil war in 1975. The civil war was one important reason for that. Norman A. Horner, writing only a few years into the civil war, noted that the "numerical strength of all the churches in Lebanon has now been materially reduced… Christians have steadily emigrated since the beginning of the civil war."[15] The trend of Lebanese emigration started during the time of the Ottoman Empire.[16] It intensified during the civil war, and continued afterwards. The Baptist churches in Lebanon were not immune to this trend. I grew up going to Baptist churches. I still remember that in the 1960s and early 1970s, attendance filled the church buildings on Sundays, and the overflow filled the balconies. Visiting these same churches when I traveled to Lebanon during my stay in Canada (1990 – 2005), the difference in numbers was obvious. The balconies were not in use anymore, with the exception of special events. The main assembly halls were hardly filled. This observation is confirmed by Pierre Francis in his book on the history of Baptist churches in

[13] A minority within the Christian community, which in itself is a minority within the Islamic context of Lebanon and the region. Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon*, 135.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Norman A. Horner, "The Churches and the Crisis in Lebanon," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 1, no. 1 (1977): 12.

[16] Akram Fouad Khater, "Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). EBSCOhost http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=65886.

Lebanon.[17] As Francis recounts the beginnings of each local Baptist church, he mentions the attendance of a few of these churches during their prime time.[18] The attendance figures at that time stand in stark contrast with the more recent attendance figures captured in this dissertation in Table 4. Moreover, the emigration of church leaders had an added impact on the churches.[19] This trend of emigration continued into the twenty-first century, and intensified after the economic collapse of 2019-2020.

Many churches in North America have encountered similar issues, experiencing decline in numbers and in relevance.[20] A 2002 survey conducted by researcher Rainer among 1,159 U.S. churches, observed that "94 percent of our churches are losing ground in the communities they serve."[21] According to Rainer's research, the majority of American churches were not catching up to the changing North American context. Similarly, the Lebanese Baptist Church was not catching up to its changing realities with its Muslim context. As local communities in North America wrestled with these issues, some started to experiment with different church models. One of the many recent perspectives that has emerged is the "missional church conversation"[22]. The use of the adjective *missional* used is a reframing of the conversation that was previously referred to as *church and mission*. The *church and mission* formulation "tends to introduce a dichotomy from which it is impossible to

[17] Francis, *History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon*, 227-324.
[18] Ibid., 235-236, 250, 296, 321.
[19] Ibid., 243, 249, 270, 275, 306.
[20] Relevance does not refer to what is important. Rather, it is a technical term defined in relation to cognitive effects. "The greater the cognitive effects, the greater the relevance." "The smaller the effort needed to achieve those effects, the greater the relevance." Gene L. Green, "Relevance Theory and Theological Interpretation: Thoughts on Metarepresentation," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 4, no. 1 (2010): 80.
[21] Rebecca Barnes and Lindy Lowery, "7 Startling Facts: An up Close Look at Church Attendance in America," *Outreach Magazine* (2018): 2.
[22] Craig van Gelder, ed. *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 26.

escape without tending to give precedence to one over the other."[23] On the other hand, the *missional church* formulation embeds a different concept: "it sees the church as being missionary in its very nature"[24] where every context is a missional context and every congregation is a missional congregation. Literature describing some of these missional churches reports a high degree of transformation of communities of God into effective[25] and vibrant witnesses for the Kingdom of God[26].

## *Purpose of the Research*

The Lebanese Baptist Church has experienced significant change over its seventy-five-year history. It has wrestled with its identity in a non-Christendom context and has attempted to remain faithful to the witness to the Gospel through significant cultural, political, and economic shifts and crises. The purpose of this research is to track the shift in the Lebanese Baptist churches' understanding of their missional ecclesiology over the past seventy-five years. By doing so, it is my intent to propose a way forward for the Lebanese Baptist churches to embrace their full missional mandate.

Many Lebanese Baptist churches and North American churches have experienced decline, albeit in a different context and for different reasons. A wealth of literature has been written on the missional church and its underlying principles and practices that help it reverse the trend of decline. The purpose of this research is to

[23] Craig van Gelder, "How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation About the Missional Church in Context," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 27.

[24] Ibid.

[25] To be effective normally indicates when there is an intended result and that result is achieved. However, in this dissertation, the understanding of what effective is will be drawn from the research.

[26] Lois Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.M. Eerdmans, 2004). This work reports on the transformation of nine churches, or clusters of churches, in North America that define themselves as Missional Churches.

investigate and explore a body of missional church literature with its underlying principles and practices to be used as a theological tool that motivates and propels a rebirth of a vision for mission within the Lebanese Baptist Church. My hypothesis is that, despite the obvious distinctness of their respective contexts, a missional North American church construct can raise issues and suggest recommendations that can help the Lebanese Baptist Church contend with its own decline.

The main research question that I want to answer in this dissertation is how might a North American missional theoretical construct serve as a theological tool to help, if at all, the Lebanese Baptist Church gain a vision for missional engagement in a Lebanese context, and what can a contextual missional ecclesiology look like and what is needed to help the Lebanese Baptist Church live fully into it?

## *Motivation for the Research*

I was born and raised in Lebanon in a Baptist family and attending a Baptist church. My sixty years of life are part of the seventy-five years of the Lebanese Baptist Convention. We are nearly the same age. The Lebanese Baptist Church formed me in my faith. For the first thirty years of my life, I was a part of its community. I felt what it was like to be a minority in my own country. I witnessed the threats and challenges to church ministry and to the spreading of the Gospel in Lebanon. I came to understand the importance of the church gathered on Sundays and to revere the churches' male-dominated autocratic leadership. As a male, I saw a place for me to be part of the leadership of the church and began to be involved in various roles.

In 1990, at the age of thirty, I immigrated to Canada. Lebanon had come through yet another civil war and opportunities for careers for young professionals like me were minimal. I made Toronto my home and started attending an Arabic-

speaking ethnic church in suburban Toronto – the Middle East Baptist Church. [27] The church recognized my leadership abilities and I embraced my responsibilities with diligence and joy.

During my fifteen-year stay in Canada, while a member at the Middle East Baptist Church, I enrolled in a missional-focused theological training program. My leadership responsibilities at the church made me cognizant of my need for being theologically equipped. This program at Tyndale Seminary[28] in Toronto was designed to equip Christians for the workplace more than clergy for ministry in a church setting. The program challenged me as a professional to explore how God is calling me to be a missionary to my workplace. I became immersed in the ecclesiology of the missional church, and I was fortunate to witness transformation within the Middle East Baptist Church, as it embarked on a journey into becoming a missional church. Out of its renewed identity, the Middle East Baptist Church "missioned" me and my wife, Mireille, back to Lebanon in 2005 in order to contribute to the work of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut.

I had visited Lebanon on several occasions during the fifteen years I lived in Canada and was able to monitor how the Lebanese Baptist churches were engaging in ministry. When I arrived back in Lebanon in 2005, I knew, both for myself and for my responsibilities at the seminary, that I needed to intentionally study the Lebanese Baptist churches' understanding of their missional calling. This then is the motivation for the research presented in this thesis.

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[27] The Middle East Baptist Church (www.mebc.org), in Mississauga, Ontario, was founded in 1990 by immigrants coming mainly from Lebanon and Iraq. The church was led by different pastors until 2002 when the pastor left the church. At that time, the church went through a process of re-identifying itself, including its structures, beliefs, ministries, leadership models, etc. That was when the church evaluated what was happening with the missional churches and started applying some of the principles that were behind them.

[28] Tyndale Seminary continues to be the fore-runner in North America in developing missional curricula for theological education. Their web site is: www.tyndale.ca.

My passion is for the Church, to see a Church that "exists for the sake of the world"[29]. I believe that the experience I had as a member of the Middle East Baptist Church and the learning about the Missional Church movement and body of literature I encountered at Tyndale Seminary are both valuable to the Church in Lebanon as it seeks a renewed vision for mission for the sake of the world in its difficult context. My hope, out of this research, is to be able to provide some ideas and concepts, coming out of the Missional Church movement and literature, which the Church in Lebanon can consider in moving forward.

The type of study I offer in this dissertation is that of autoethnography, "a research method and methodology which uses the researcher's personal experience as data to describe, analyze and understand cultural experience. It is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context."[30]

In her review of Heewon Chang's work, Martha M. Snyder summarizes that a distinctive of autoethnography is that "it moves beyond the personal story into an analysis and interpretation of a culture. It is a way to analyze and interpret a culture using one's personal story."[31] As such, auto-ethnographers "systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)."[32]

In my introductory remarks, I offered an overview of my personal story – being part of the Lebanese Baptist Church from childhood to young adulthood, my experience as an immigrant to Canada in which I became a member of the Middle

[29] This phrase has been widely used in the missional and ecclesiological literature. It is not clear who originally used the phrase.

[30] Elaine Campbell, "Exploring Autoethnography as a Method and Methodology in Legal Education Research," *Asian Journal of Legal Education* 3, no. 1 (2016): 96.

[31] Martha M. Snyder, "Leaning into Autoethnography: A Review of Heewon Chang's Autoethnography as Method," *The Qualitative Report* 20, no. 2 (2015): 93.

[32] Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 36, no. 4 (138) (2011): 273.

East Baptist Church and a student of missional ecclesiology at Tyndale Seminary, and of returning to Lebanon to contribute to the work of the seminary in Beirut. My autobiography is part of the data I offer to help understand the development of the Lebanese Baptist Church over the seventy-five-year history of the Convention. However, story is not the only data autoethnography considers. It also demands thorough research components which I offer in two forms – the form of results from intentional field research interview data with various Lebanese Baptist Church leaders and members and, secondly, the form of case studies in which I describe in each case study a particular event, circumstance, or context to enlighten a particular aspect of the Lebanese Baptist Church.

I find Snyder's two diagrams[33] helpful in understanding the methodology of autoethnography. The triad on the right is Chang's representation of autoethnography based on the left triad by Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner as cited by Chang.[34]

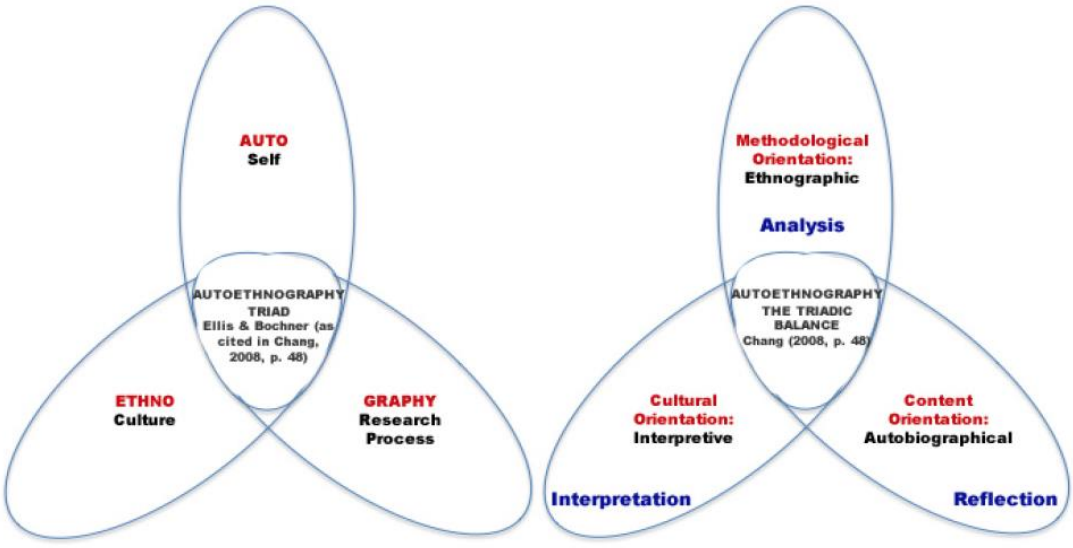


**Figure 1 - Autoethnography**

[33] Snyder, "Leaning into Autoethnography: A Review of Heewon Chang's Autoethnography as Method", 94.

[34] Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, Developing Qualitative Inquiry (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Left Coast Press, 2008).

Both diagrams illustrate a triadic balance (which may be in varying emphases) of reflection, analysis, and interpretation. Autoethnography is a process of reflecting autobiographically, analyzing gathered data, and interpreting for understanding. Therefore, I want to locate myself within this study from the beginning, by reflecting on my own history and lived personal experience in Lebanon, in Canada, then back in Lebanon, and reflecting on my own understanding of how practice intersects with theology. In my reflections, I find that I resonate well with Elaine L. Graham as I consider "my own personal faith journey; my pedagogical and supervisory practice in helping new forms of knowledge to emerge, including practice-based research in theological studies; and what it means to consider the realms of practice and experience as theologically significant."[35] The dynamic process of autoethnography values my experience as a member of the unfolding missional church thinking in Lebanon (auto). It also takes seriously the Lebanese cultural context (ethno) and expects a serious and informed analysis (graphy) of both. I analyze the data from intentional interviews, observations, and relevant documents as well as particular case studies, and I interpret all of this with the help of a theological tool, a missional church body of literature, for the purpose of forming and cultivating a contextual theology for the sake of the Gospel through the Lebanese Baptist Church.

## *Scope and Overview*

In Chapter Two, I offer an explanation of the history, context, and landscape of the Lebanese Baptist Church. I first present the current demographic makeup of Lebanon. I offer a view of the general religious landscape, then narrow my focus to the Evangelical landscape, and finally further narrow it down to the Baptist landscape.

[35] Elaine L. Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian: Past, Present and Future Tenses," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 1.

The reason behind these concentric views is to place the Baptists within the larger picture of the religious composition of Lebanon. Secondly, I offer a brief overview of the history of Baptists in Lebanon. This will by no means be a comprehensive history. My objective is to describe the beginnings of the Baptist movement in Lebanon with a brief stop at all the important milestones or junctures that contributed to shaping the Baptist Church and its vision. I also highlight the external factors that influenced the Baptist Church in Lebanon throughout its short history and offer some observations on what can be deduced of the shape and vision of the Baptist Church since its inception. I also offer personal observations that come out of my lived experience.

In Chapter Three, I present two significant sets of data. Both sets inform my intentional autoethnographic analysis. The first set of data is the result of field research I conducted upon my arrival back in Lebanon after my stay in Canada. I present the specifics of collecting information about the Lebanese Baptist Church: the development of the interview questions organized around seven categories of understanding of church, the sampling method used to choose the participating churches and members, and the various documents considered. I then analyze the results in order to offer several characteristics of the Lebanese Baptist Church up until 2011.

The second set of data consists of three case studies: First, of my Canadian experience (1990-2005); second, of theological education in Lebanon (2005-2014); and last, of how several Lebanese Baptist churches responded in times of significant political, humanitarian, and economic crises (2011-2020). The two sets of data inform my lived understanding of the Lebanese Baptist Church and provides the findings I bring into conversation with what I am characterizing as the Missional Church Conversation in Chapter Five.

Before the findings of Chapter Three are brought into conversation with the Missional Church Conversation in Chapter Five, I offer an overview, in Chapter Four, of the Missional Church Conversation itself. It is a body of literature that articulates the authors' response to their felt decline in the effectiveness and relevance of some North American churches. The authors have determined that, what they are calling today *the missional church*, is their Biblical answer to what a community of God should look like. I analyze the tenets, characteristics, and practices of these missional church constructs. I analyze how they perceive that the North American Church can reverse the decline. A lot has been written on this topic,[36] and there are some significant participants in this conversation. I include a literature survey and engage the most significant writings during the initial period of the emergence of the missional church movement.

Chapter Five is where the findings of Chapter Three are brought into conversation with the Missional Church Conversation of Chapter Four. In this chapter, I analyze the changes that are already taking place within the Lebanese Baptist Church, and in conversation with the Missional Church Conversation, I propose a way forward for the Lebanese Baptist Church's missional engagement in Lebanon. At the end of the chapter, I offer what might serve as a starting point for a Lebanese contextual missional ecclesiology.

And finally, Chapter Six reviews how the main research question was answered. It also offers a summary of the journey of the Lebanese Baptist Church by providing a comparison between its lived missional ecclesiology at the start of the field research and a new proposed ecclesiology. Chapter Six also includes suggestions for further research.

[36] A comprehensive literature survey is presented in Chapter Four.

## *Limitations of Research*

The first limitation is that of field research. The tools used to study the local churches are interviews, observations, and the study of formal church documents. The observations themselves consist of a few church visits during the formal church gathering times. A lot more information could be gathered by spending substantial time with each church, by living and serving with the congregations, and by listening to the desires and aspirations of all the members. In addition, more information could be obtained by participating in church life and ministry and by listening to the preaching and teaching presented in each church. This is why the data gathered through these tools are carefully selected to provide input suitable for the purposes of this research.

The second limitation concerns the journeys of churches described in the literature of the Missional Church Conversation. These churches provided the impetus for others to follow in their leading. The literature, however, describes the beginnings of these journeys, but does not evaluate the success, or lack of, of these journeys several years down the road. Having that information would have been invaluable to this research. This was not within the scope of the research.[37]

The third limitation is related to the ever changing landscape on which the Lebanese Baptist Church is located. The presentation of the case studies in Chapter Three offers an insight into the magnitude of and speed with which the Lebanese Baptist Church has been changing. The changes have just started. There is no way to predict where the ministry of the churches will land as they are compelled to respond to continuously changing realities. This research is able to capture the initial impact of the political, humanitarian, and economic events, but it will take many years for the

[37] Refer to the section on Suggestions for Further Research on page 316.

church ministry to stabilize before a complete analysis of the changes can take place.[38]

[38] Also refer to the section on Suggestions for Further Research on page 316.

# Chapter Two: The Lebanese Baptist Church Context

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an explanation of the history, context, and landscape of the Lebanese Baptist Church. I first present the current demographic makeup of Lebanon. I offer a view of the general religious landscape, then the Evangelical landscape within it, and finally the Baptist landscape. This helps situate the Baptists within the larger religious composition in Lebanon. Secondly, I offer a brief overview of the history of Baptists in Lebanon. This will not be a comprehensive history as very little is documented in writing. My objective is to describe the beginnings of the Baptist movement in Lebanon with a brief stop at all the important milestones or junctures that contributed to shaping the Baptist Church and its vision. I also highlight some external factors that influenced the Baptist Church in Lebanon throughout its short history and offer some observations on what can be deduced of the shape and vision of the Baptist Church upon its inception. In addition, I offer my own observations based on my experience growing up and living within this Baptist community.

## *The Present-day Lebanese Religious Landscape*

Lebanon is a multi-confessional nation where religion has an overriding importance in its makeup. The state power is divided among the different religious sects, and religious authorities have certain judicial powers. The Lebanese constitution guarantees the freedom of religion and the freedom to exercise all religious rites, provided that the public order is not disturbed[39]. In addition, the

[39] Article 9 of Part I of the Lebanese Constitution guarantees these rights. The Lebanese Constitution was promulgated in 1926 and amended in 1995. "The Lebanese Constitution", The Lebanese Parliament https://www.lp.gov.lb/backoffice/uploads/files/Lebanese%20%20Constitution-%20En.pdf (accessed 30 October 2020).

constitution guarantees that the personal status and religious interests of the population are respected. This is why each recognized religion in Lebanon (described below) has the authority to maintain its own personal status laws. Each of these religions appoints its own representatives to what is called *religious courts* that adjudicate areas of marriage, divorce, adoption, custody, and alimony according to their respective religious laws. Islamic religious courts also adjudicate in areas of inheritance according to Islamic Shari'a. Christian religious courts, however, do not deal with matters of inheritance but are left to the civil authorities.[40]

The political system in Lebanon is known as *confessionalism* where an attempt was made for the power to be distributed as fairly as possible among the different religious sects.[41] Every citizen of Lebanon is affiliated with a religion and it is recorded in each individual's personal identity record. This religious affiliation determines a citizen's eligibility for high-level governmental positions, including in the military. The parliament seats are also distributed by religion, and eligibility for citizens to be elected as representatives is based on their religious affiliation.

The population of Lebanon today is around six million.[42] This is only an estimate.[43] The last official national population census was conducted in Lebanon in 1932 when Christians made up just over half of the population.[44] The Christian

[40] Charles Costa, interview by author, 19 March 2008. At the time of the interview, Costa was a pastor of a local Baptist church and the Chief Magistrate of the Evangelical Court of the First Instance in Lebanon.

[41] "Factsheet: Understanding Lebanese Confessionalism," *Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East*, no. 20 (2007).

[42] This count includes around 400,000 Palestinian refugees, 1,500,000 Syrian refugees, and other refugee and stateless people such as Bedouins. Not included are Lebanese citizens that live in the diaspora.

[43] The CIA's estimate as of July 2020 is 5,469,612. "The World Factbook - Lebanon", Central Intelligence Agency https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html (accessed 30 October 2020). This figure has climbed up from under 4,000,000 before the Syrian refugee crisis. The World Bank's chart shows the increase in population. "Lebanon", The World Bank https://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanon?display=def (accessed 30 October 2020).

[44] Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who Are the Lebanese?," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1999): 222. The Christian majority at the time of the

percentage has been declining since then for two reasons. The rate of birth of Muslims is much higher than that of Christians, and the migration rate of Christians is much higher than that of Muslims[45], especially during the civil war between 1975 and 1990. There are, of course, more complex socio-economic and socio-political factors behind these two reasons.[46] Because of the delicate sectarian confessional political system in Lebanon, and because Christians had more power because of their historical majority, the government has deliberately avoided any comprehensive update to the 1932 census.[47]

Lebanon has eighteen officially recognized religions (4 Muslim, 12 Christian, Druze[48] and Jewish). The main Muslim sects are Shi'ites and Sunnis. The majority of Christians are Maronites,[49] with smaller percentages of Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics. The rest of the religions are minorities. There are no reliable figures for the breakdown of the population by religion, and estimates vary widely. Table 1 provides estimates of the breakdown by major religions from two different sources.

census was 6 to 5, according to Joseph Chamie, "Religious Groups in Lebanon: A Descriptive Investigation " *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 2 (1980): 175.

[45] Collelo suggests that, historically, the rate of migration of Christians to Muslims has been as high as six to one. Thomas Collelo, "Lebanon: A Country Study", GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987 http://countrystudies.us/lebanon/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

[46] For more on this topic, consult Tarek Mitri, "Christians in the Arab East: An Interpretation of Contemporary History," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, ed. Habib Badr et al. (Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 851-869.

[47] Collelo, "Lebanon: A Country Study".

[48] Druze are a "small Middle Eastern religious sect characterized by an eclectic system of doctrines and by a cohesion and loyalty among its members" according to The Editors of The Encyclopædia Britannica, "Druze", Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/172195/Druze (accessed 30 October 2020). They may outwardly appear as Muslims. However, they are not considered Muslims by other Muslims.

[49] Maronites were originally part of the Eastern Church but have made ties with the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope is the head of the Maronite Church, but they have retained their own liturgy and customs. Maronites frequently identify themselves as Catholics when they are outside the region. For more information on Maronites, consult: Cyril Hovorun, "Maronites," *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (2011).

| Source | Shi'ites | Sunnis | Druze | Maronites | Greek Orthodox | Greek Catholic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CIA[50] | 30.5% | 30.6% | 5.2% | 33.7% Christians | | |
| Britannica[51] (2012 figures) | 27.0% | 27.0% | 5.6% | 21.0% | 8.0% | 5.0% |

**Table 1 - Population Distribution by Major Religions**

Table 2 lists all the recognized religions with an estimate of their respective percentage of the population using Encyclopedia Britannica's estimates.[52]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Muslims** | **55%** |
| Shi'ites | 27.0% |
| Sunnis | 27.0% |
| 'Alawites | <1% |
| Isma'ilis | <1% |
| **Christians** | **39%** |
| Maronites | 21.0% |
| Greek Orthodox | 8.0% |
| Greek Catholics (Melkite Catholics) | 5.0% |
| Armenian Orthodox | 4% |
| Armenian Catholics | <1% |
| Syriac Orthodox | <1% |
| Syriac Catholics | <1% |
| Assyrians (Nestorians) | <1% |
| Chaldeans | <1% |
| Copts | <1% |
| Evangelicals[53] | <1% |
| Latins (Roman Catholics) | <1% |
| **Druze** | **5.6%** |
| **Jews** | **<1%** |

**Table 2 - Percentage of Lebanese by Recognized Religion**

The demographic distribution of these religions in Lebanon can be seen in Figure 1.[54] This map is not totally accurate as the various religious groups are not

[50] "The World Factbook - Lebanon".

[51] "Lebanon", Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. https://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon/Climate#ref23391 (accessed 30 October 2020).

[52] Ibid.

[53] The terms "Evangelicals" and "Protestants" are used synonymously in Lebanon. The term "Evangelicals" does not refer to conservative theology, as in the West, but to people responding to the Gospel, according to Bailey and Bailey in Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey, *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 97. Baptists are included under this category.

[54] Map courtesy of www.theodora.com/maps, used with permission.

segregated along clear lines. However, it gives an approximate idea of the majority groups in each region of Lebanon. Notice how the percentages differ from the other sources.

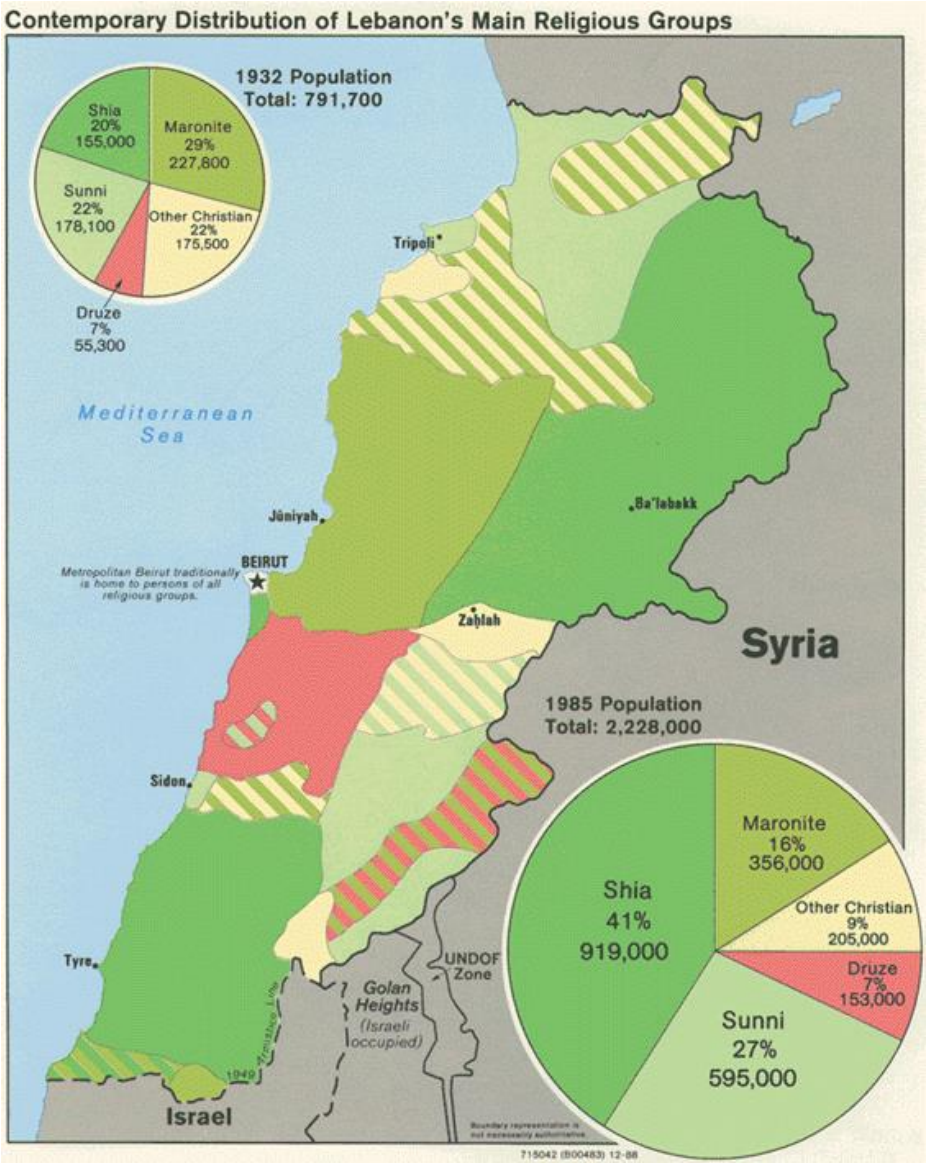


**Figure 2 - Religious Demographic Distribution in Lebanon**

Some religious groups in Lebanon are not officially recognized by the government, such as Baha'is, Hindus, and unregistered Evangelical groups. These groups have the same freedom of worship and belief, but their members do not qualify for senior government positions (which are divided by religion). However, these groups have to be registered under another recognized religion to benefit from the judicial system for issues of personal status.

Evangelicals in Lebanon are recognized by the government as an official religion and are represented by one body: The Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon,[55] which was founded in 1937. This council serves as the legal umbrella for Evangelicals for representation within both the Syrian and Lebanese governments.

The Supreme Council consists of fifteen Evangelical denominations, which are legally recognized by the Lebanese government by virtue of their belonging to the Council. Table 3[56] shows the different denominations with their respective number of churches and members in Lebanon.

[55] Web site: http://scevanchurch.org/.

[56] *Member Unions of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon* (Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon, 2008). Figures for each denomination were obtained by contacting the respective denominational offices.

| Denomination | Churches in Lebanon | Members in Lebanon |
|---|---|---|
| National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (Presbyterian)[57] | 19 | 2,000 |
| Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East[58] | 6 | 3,500 |
| National Evangelical Church of Beirut[59] | 10 | 100 |
| Church of God Convention in Lebanon and Syria[60] | 8 | 400-500 |
| All Saints Evangelical Episcopalian Church of Beirut (Anglican)[61] | 1 | 400 |
| Convention of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon[62] | 23 | 1,100 |
| Seventh Day Adventist Church of Lebanon[63] | 5 | 250 |
| Evangelical Christian Alliance Church[64] | 5 | 328 |
| Assembly of the Evangelical Brethren Church in Lebanon and Syria[65] | 7 | 350-450 |
| General Convention of the Evangelical Nazarene Church of Lebanon[66] | 3 | 50 |
| Church of Friends[67] | 1 | 80 |
| Union of Baptist Evangelical Churches in Syria[68] | - | - |
| Free Evangelical Church[69] | 2 | 150 |
| National Evangelical Church in Bludan – Syria[70] | - | - |
| Church of the Evangelical German-Speaking Community in Beirut (non-voting member)[71] | 1 | 160-200 |

**Table 3 - Recognized Evangelical Denominations in Lebanon and Syria**

## *The Present-day Lebanese Baptist Landscape*

There are thirty churches in Lebanon today that identify themselves as Baptist. Seven of these churches are independent and do not belong to the Convention of

[57] "National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009). The number of church members in Lebanon is an estimate based on four-year-old statistics.

[58] "Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the near East: Statistics of Member Churches," (2017).

[59] "National Evangelical Church of Beirut: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009).The number of members is an estimate. They do not have official statistics.

[60] "Church of God Convention in Lebanon and Syria: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009). The number of members is an estimate. They do not have any official statistics.

[61] "All Saints Evangelical Episcopalian Church of Beirut: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009). There is only one Anglican Church in Lebanon with two congregations, an Arabic speaking congregation (250 members) and an English-speaking congregation (150 members).

[62] Figures compiled from Table 5 on page 28 below.

[63] "Seventh Day Adventist Church of Lebanon: Statistics of Member Churches," (2017).

[64] "Evangelical Christian Alliance Church: Statistics of Member Churches," (2017).

[65] "Assembly of the Evangelical Brethren Church in Lebanon and Syria: Statistics of Member Churches," (2017). Brethren churches in Lebanon are divided into “Open” churches (2 congregations, 150-200 members) and “Closed” churches (5 congregations, 200-250 members).

[66] "General Convention of the Evangelical Nazarene Church of Lebanon: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009).

[67] "Church of Friends: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009).

[68] Not relevant for this research. No churches in Lebanon.

[69] "Free Evangelical Church: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009). The number of members is an estimate. No official statistics exist.

[70] No churches in Lebanon.

[71] "Church of the Evangelical German-Speaking Community in Beirut: Statistics of Member Churches," (2009).The number of members is an estimate. No official statistics exist.

Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon. Consequently, they are not members of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon, hence not officially recognized by the government. The rest of the twenty-three churches belong to the Baptist Convention[72]. Nineteen of them are fully active members. The other four are only members to be legally recognized, but they are not active in the ministry of the Convention, and they do not totally agree with the vision of the Convention. For the sake of my research, I will classify the Baptist churches in Lebanon according to their relationship to the Convention: *active*, *inactive*, or *non-members*. Some of the inactive churches and non-member churches would like to form their own union and seek legal recognition through the Supreme Council. Table 4 shows a list of all thirty churches by their geographical distribution. Figure 2[73] visually illustrates the location of these churches on a map of Lebanon (outside Beirut), and on a map of Beirut in figure 3[74].

[72] The Convention of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon, referred to as the *Baptist Convention* or the *Convention* in the rest of this dissertation.

[73] I obtained the map from the web site www.the-lebanon.com, and I placed the pins that show the location of the churches on the map. I sought permission from the web site's webmaster to use this map, but they could not give me permission since the map is not theirs and they do not know who the original map owner is.

[74] Ibid.

| Church Name | Relationship to Convention | Church Name | Relationship to Convention |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***North Lebanon*** | | ***Beka'*** | |
| Rahbeh Baptist | Active | Riyak Baptist | Active |
| Miniara Baptist | Non-member | Zahle Baptist | Active |
| Kfar Habou Baptist | Active | Khirbet Kanafar Baptist | Active |
| Tripoli Baptist | Active | | |
| Beshmezzine Baptist | Active | ***South Lebanon*** | |
| Ras Maska Baptist | Active | Mieh ou Mieh Baptist | Inactive |
| | | Marjeyoun Baptist | Inactive |
| ***Mount Lebanon*** | | Deir Mimas Baptist | Active |
| Ballouneh Baptist | Inactive | | |
| Adonis Baptist | Active | ***Beirut*** | |
| Bikfaya Evangelical Baptist | Active | Ras Beirut Baptist | Active |
| Truth of the Gospel - Fanar | Active | First Baptist – Ras Beirut | Non-member |
| Lebanon Baptist | Non-member | Mousaitbeh Baptist | Active |
| Faith Baptist - Mansourieh | Active | Ashrafieh Baptist | Non-member |
| Hadath Baptist | Active | Badaro Baptist | Active |
| Hadath | Inactive | Dora Baptist | Non-member |
| Jamhour Baptist | Active | Christ Baptist | Non-member |
| Louaize Baptist | Non-member | | |
| Ain Dara Baptist | Active | | |

**Table 4 - List of Baptist Churches in Lebanon**

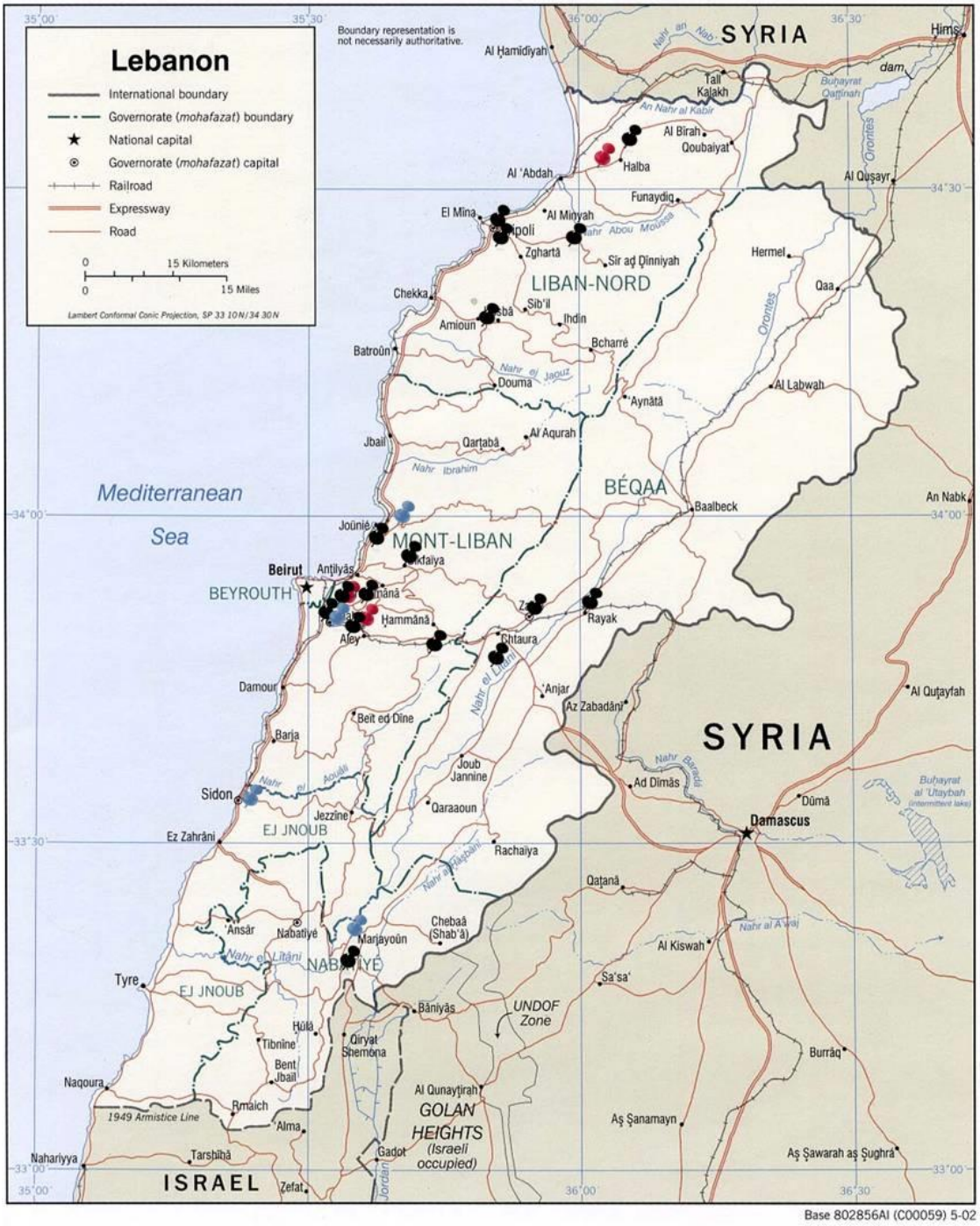


**Figure 3 - Location of Baptist Churches in Lebanon (Outside Beirut)**

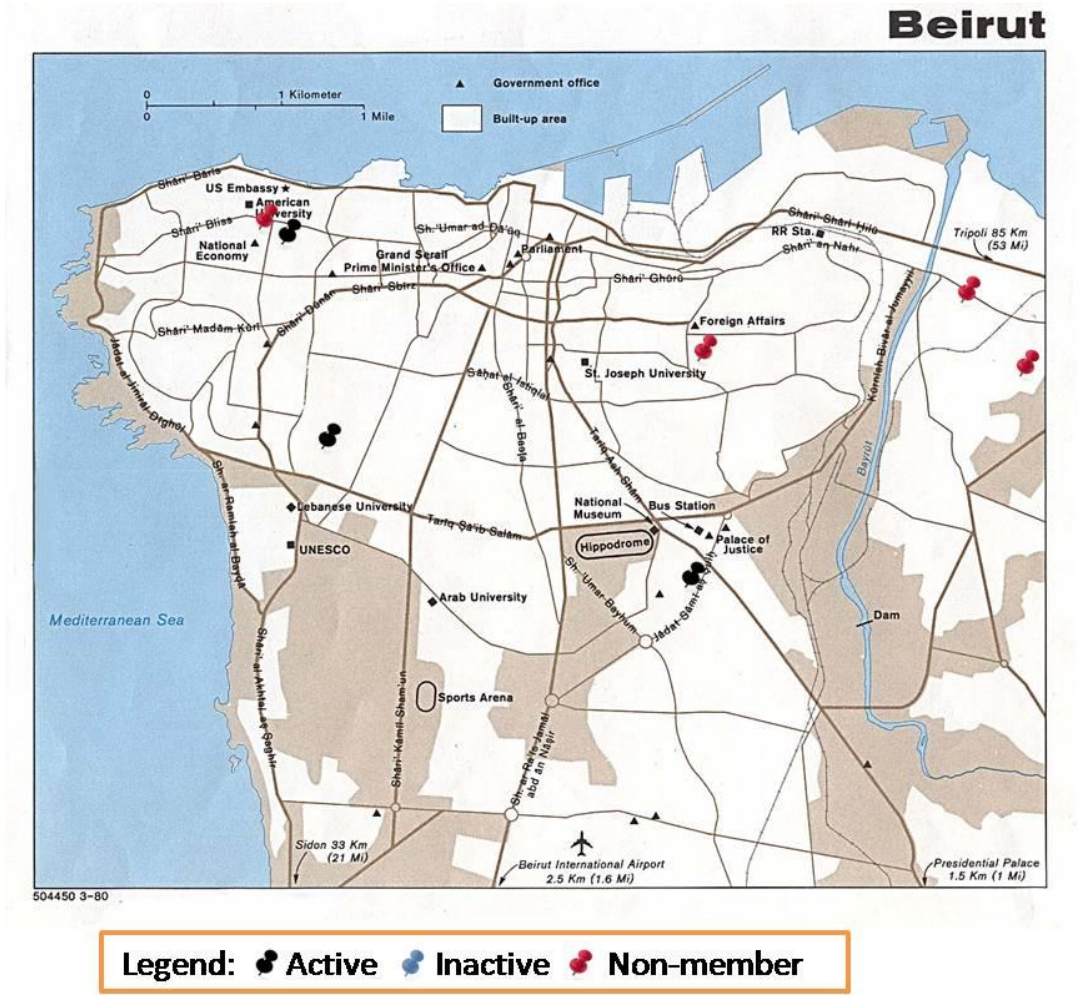


**Figure 4 - Location of Baptist Churches in Beirut**

The Baptist Convention was founded in 1955. The objectives of the Convention are:[75] First, to protect the interests of the churches, regulate all issues of personal status, represent the churches at the Supreme Council, and act as public representative when needed. Second, to facilitate relationships among the member churches, unite their efforts, and coordinate various spiritual and social activities among the churches.

There are a few reasons why independent churches decided to stay outside the convention, according to Edgar Traboulsi, pastor of a leading independent Baptist

[75] دستور مجمع الكنائس الإنجيلية المعمدانية في لبنان (Beirut: Convention of the Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon, 2011), 5.

church in Lebanon.[76] First, a historical reason: the Convention was founded by Baptist churches affiliated with American Southern Baptist missionaries. According to Traboulsi, the relationship between the Southern Baptist missionaries and other independent American missionaries was not the best. Consequently, independent Baptist churches were excluded from the Convention. The independent Baptist churches were able to secure their government recognition under the cover of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut through personal friendships. These Independent churches eventually became part of the Convention in the eighties, only to pull back a few years later due to strategic differences. The Independent churches place a lot of importance on the unity of doctrine with the other member churches of the Convention. They felt that a lot of "neo-orthodoxism and liberalism"[77] was seeping into the rest of the Baptist churches in Lebanon. Many disagreements took place within the Convention. The two groups were looking at one another with suspicion and a lack of mutual trust was building. The Independent churches prefer that there would be a fellowship of churches rather than a convention. The fellowship would be more of a loose relationship between the churches without any ecclesial or hierarchical influence. According to Traboulsi, the main objective of the fellowship would be to give legal cover for the churches under the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Churches. This is how they can take care of personal status matters. In a convention, on the other hand, there would be a general agreement on doctrine and on internal church matters on which a church qualifies to become a member of the convention, and on which the selection and ordination of pastors is managed.

[76] Edgar Traboulsi, interview by author, 19 March 2008. Traboulsi is also founder and president of Lebanon Baptist Seminary (http://www.lebanonbaptistchurch.org/Seminary). cf Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon*, 188-191.

[77] Traboulsi, interview.

The Convention officials acknowledge the difficulties that have faced them during the years, and they have concluded that they should not be just a legal cover for the churches, and they should not be on the other end of the spectrum either, a centralized controlling body that has direct authority on all the member churches. Instead, they view themselves as a uniting body that encourages and facilitates collaboration between the member churches in areas of ministry and mission.[78]

In 2011, the Convention worked on refining its vision and core values for the next ten years. Its new vision is built on five strategic themes and values:[79] representation (of all member churches, internally and externally), sponsorship (of Baptist ministry in Lebanon, spiritually and socially), partnership (by strengthening the ministry of member churches and support of planting new churches), stewardship (by supporting member churches), and fellowship (between the different national Baptist communities).

From this point on, I am going to focus only on the Baptist churches that are active in the Convention because there is more homogeneity among these churches in their history; in the factors that influence their structure, composition and growth; and in their vision, mission, and core values.

Table 4 shows a list of the active churches in the Convention with some relevant demographic data. It is important to note here that most churches in Lebanon do not regularly track attendance. Attendance figures are reported by the churches based on estimates.

[78] دستور مجمع الكنائس الإنجيلية المعمدانية في لبنان, 5.
[79] Ibid., 5-6.

| Church | Year Planted | Location | Religious Context | Members (Men/ Women) | Sunday Attendance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mousaitbeh Baptist | 1948 | Beirut | Predominantly Muslim area | 32(15/17) | 75 |
| Bikfaya Baptist | 1951 | Mount Lebanon | Predominantly Christian area | 60(35/25) | 80 |
| Badaro Baptist | 1956 | Beirut | Predominantly Christian area | 117(47/70) | 180 |
| Hadath Baptist | 1958 | Suburb of Beirut | Predominantly Christian area | 98(44/54) | 125 |
| Ras Beirut Baptist | 1954 | Beirut | Mixed with Muslim majority | 67(32/35) | 120 |
| Tripoli Baptist | 1949 | North Lebanon | Predominantly Muslim area | 31(17/14) | 65 |
| Truth of the Gospel – Fanar | 1960 | Mount Lebanon | Predominantly Christian area | 75(40/45) | 100 |
| Ain Dara Baptist | 1951 | Mount Lebanon | Mixed Christian/Druze town in a predominantly Druze area | 60(30/30) | 80 |
| Rahbeh Baptist | 1961 | North Lebanon | Predominantly Christian area | 30(13/17) | 40 |
| Kfar Habou Baptist | 1970 | North Lebanon | Christian town in a mixed Christian/ Muslim area | 57(29/28) | 110 |
| Riyak Baptist | 1973 | Beka‘ | ? | 60(21/39) | 100 |
| Faith Baptist – Mansourieh | 1976 | Mount Lebanon | Predominantly Christian area | 54(22/32) | 80 |
| Deir Mimas Baptist | 1988 | South Lebanon | Christian town in a predominantly Muslim area | 26(9/17) | 60 |
| Khirbit Kanafar Baptist | 1976 | Beka‘ | Christian town in a predominantly Muslim area | 22(9/13) | 45 |
| Bechmezzine Baptist | 1954 | North Lebanon | Predominantly Christian area | 15(8/7) | 25 |
| Ras Maska Baptist | 1964 | North Lebanon | Christian town in a predominantly Muslim area | 38(20/18) | 65 |
| Jamhour Baptist | 2001 | Mount Lebanon | Predominantly Christian area | 25(16/9) | 40 |
| Adonis Baptist | 2002 | Mount Lebanon | Predominantly Christian | 31(16/15) | 85 |
| Zahle Baptist | 2002 | Beka‘ | Christian city in a predominantly Muslim area | 26(14/12) | 35 |

**Table 5 - Baptist Convention Churches**[80]

## *A Brief History of the Lebanese Baptist Churches*

The main flow of Protestant missionaries to Lebanon started in the nineteenth century, and the Baptist missionaries in the twentieth century. However, this was by no means the start of Christianity in Lebanon. The Christian message was borne out of this region, and there has always been a presence of the historic churches in Lebanon.

[80] *The Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Ministry Profile* (Beirut: Dar Manhal Al Hayat, 2007). These are the most recent statistics available.

The majority of Christians in Lebanon have been Maronites, who were originally part of the Eastern Church. Maronites in Lebanon, even though they had been *Arabized* in terms of language, did not consider themselves as Arabs[81]. They viewed themselves more as the descendants of the Phoenicians. They resisted the Arabic invasion of Lebanon and they retreated to remote areas of Mount Lebanon. During the crusades, they maintained friendly ties with the crusaders and offered their help to the Franks.[82] As a result of the crusades and their relationship with the Franks, the Maronites began to align themselves with Rome and the papacy as early as 1182.[83]

**Catholic Missions to Lebanon**

Issa Diab, a scholar who has critically studied the history of the church in Lebanon, observes that whenever a church stops growing and multiplying, a newer and more vibrant church rises to continue the great commission.[84] Most of the new Catholic Church movements in Lebanon have come from the West, and they began long before the Protestant missions. Catholic missionaries started coming to Lebanon since the schism of 1054 between the East and the West.[85] These missionary movements intensified in the mid-sixteenth century to strengthen a weak local church after a few centuries of Ottoman rule.[86] The main players in these movements were the Jesuits. They started to get involved in different towns in Mount Lebanon. Their strategy was to connect the West with the Eastern churches, not at the level of the

[81] For further reading on the Maronite Church's self-understanding of its own identity, there are numerous web sites that can be consulted, such as http://phoenicia.org/maronites.html and http://www.maronite-heritage.com/LNE.php?page=History.

[82] Antonie Wessels, *Arab and Christian?: Christians in the Middle East* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995), 104-107.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Issa Diab, مدخل إلى تاريخ الكنائس الإنجيلية ولاهوتها [Introduction to the History and Theology of the Evangelical Churches] (Mansourieh, Lebanon: Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 99.

[85] Habib Badr, "Mission to 'Nominal Christians': The Policy and Practice of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and Its Missionaries Concerning Eastern Churches Which Led to the Organization of a Protestant Church in Beirut (1819-1848)" (Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1992), 1.

[86] Diab, *Introduction to the History and Theology of the Evangelical Churches*, 99.

leaders but at the grassroots level. They founded many religious societies and "applied themselves to preaching and holding spiritual retreats according to the method of their founder, St. Ignatius."[87] They translated many religious and spiritual texts to Arabic.

**Protestant Missions to Lebanon**

The Protestant missions to Lebanon started in the nineteenth century. Their original intention was not to plant protestant churches but to proclaim the good news of the gospel, and their primary aim was to evangelize Jews to speed up the second coming of Christ.[88] This is why they wanted to reside in Jerusalem. However, the Ottoman law at the time prevented expatriates from owning property and establishing their residence in Jerusalem. Consequently, they chose to set up their work in Beirut in 1823.[89] It did not take them long to discover that it is not easy to evangelize Jews, or even Muslims. It ended up that the missionaries' primary target became the nominal Christians.[90] "Although convincing an Eastern Christian to convert to a foreign Protestant denomination presented difficulties," comments Trexler, "shared theological frameworks and a shared sacred text made it easier to convince an Eastern Christian to convert to evangelical Protestantism than to convince a Muslim to do so."[91]

The first protestant missionaries to appear on the scene were sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, a sending body affiliated then with the Congregational and Presbyterian churches in the United States. These missionaries understood that to grow in their spiritual life Christians were dependent

[87] Salim Daccache, "Catholic Missions in the Middle East," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, ed. Habib Badr et al. (Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 694.

[88] Habib Badr, "Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria and Turkey," in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East*, ed. Habib Badr et al. (Beirut, Lebanon: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), 715.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Protestant missionaries considered adherents of the historic churches as nominal Christians.

[91] Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon*, 42-43.

on spreading the Word of God.[92] In order to accomplish that, they were convinced that education was extremely important. As a result, they began to open schools, then a printing press, a theological seminary, and finally a university that later became the American University of Beirut.

It is important to note here that the missionaries of that era, represented by some well-known missionaries such as Henry Jessup (1832-1910), had a negative approach to Islam. They saw Islam as "the instigator of 'moral chaos'."[93] They wrote and talked about the "Mohammedan threat". This had tremendous influence on how Protestants viewed Islam, Muslims, and their prophet. As a result, this had a big impact on how Muslims started to view Protestants.

It is also important to note that the missionaries of that era, as studied by Christine Beth Lindner, had as their aim to produce Protestants, not modern, enlightened, civilized individuals.[94] Their literacy initiatives and printing service advancements were to promote discipleship initiatives. However, some "asserted a Protestant identity in order to secure economic and political prestige."[95] Right from the beginning, therefore, the Protestant circle "represented a hybrid mixture of identities and a unique interpretation on what it meant to be both modern and Christian."[96]

As the time of the first ABCFM[97] missionaries came to an end in 1860, "the now established, but refined, Protestant community sought to positively influence the

[92] Badr, "Evangelical Missions and Churches in the Middle East," 717.
[93] Wessels, *Arab and Christian?*, 166-167.
[94] Christine Beth Lindner, "Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860" (University of Edinburgh, 2009), 267.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions

Syrian region through re-negotiating and re-defining its position within this dynamic milieu."[98]

It is against this backdrop that Baptists appeared on the scene in Lebanon.

**The Beginning of Baptist Ministry in Lebanon**

The first known Baptist in Lebanon was Sa'id Jraydīny.[99] He was born in Shwayfat, Lebanon, in 1866 to Greek Orthodox parents. He went to an Evangelical school,[100] but he was not serious about his faith then. He was known among his friends as an atheist. He went to Chicago in 1893 on a business trip where he was invited to attend evangelistic meetings by a relative of his. He later moved to Saint Louis, Missouri, where he started attending a Baptist church. It did not take long before Sa'id came to personal faith in Jesus Christ and "experienced forgiveness of sins."[101] He then came back to Lebanon and resumed his profession as a photographer, but his life was not the same as before. He started using his profession as a platform to profess his faith among his family, friends, acquaintances, and clients. His studio became a small church where the message of the Gospel was constantly preached. "For many years Jureidini was the pastor of the church and the main pillar of Baptist work in Lebanon."[102] A group from the church in Saint Louis came to visit Sa'id to help him with the ministry. Many people were hearing the message and responding to God.

Sa'id became a famous preacher. He was regularly invited to other Evangelical churches to preach on Sunday mornings. Around 1900, Sa'id went back

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[98] Lindner, "Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860", 269.

[99] Salim Sharouk, تاريخ المعمدانيين في لبنان [History of Baptists in Lebanon] (Qilfat Printer, 1959), 4-6.

[100] Francis, *History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon*, 59-71.

[101] Ibid., 69.

[102] John David Hughey, Jr., "Baptist Foreign Mission Work in the Arab World," *Baptist History and Heritage* 4 (1969): 107.

to the States to raise awareness of the ministry needs in Lebanon. He contacted many groups, including the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. However, they were not ready to start helping the ministry in Lebanon at that time. He finally found some modest help, got married to an American woman, and came back to Lebanon in 1905.[103] Sa'id rented a church in Beirut from the Presbyterians, and the first Baptist congregation was formed.

A few other small churches were planted around Lebanon as a result of Sa'id's early ministry. The ministry was growing modestly during that time, due to the limited resources and to the onset of World War I, and then followed by World War II.

In 1922, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention decided to send the first two families to Lebanon. They founded the Near East Southern Baptist Mission under which they operated in Lebanon.[104] This was the start of cooperation between the Southern Baptists and the local Lebanese Baptists in planting and growing new churches. By that time there were enough leaders maturing in the Baptist churches who were able to pastor the new and growing congregations.

1948 was an important year in the life of Baptists in Lebanon. This was when Finlay and Julia Graham, Southern Baptist Missionaries, moved to Lebanon from Jordan. They were instrumental in getting substantial help to the Baptists in Lebanon, financial and otherwise. It is due to their efforts that the Near East Southern Baptist Mission was able to buy a piece of land in Mousaitbeh, a central area of Beirut. A school (elementary and secondary)[105] and church building (seating 300) were built on this property, both are still operational today. They were inaugurated in 1956. Kamil

[103] Francis, *History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon*, 75.
[104] Ibid., 82.
[105] Hughey, "Baptist Foreign Mission Work in the Arab World", 109.

Chamoun, the President of Lebanon at the time, was present at the ceremony.[106] Baptists were gaining more exposure in Lebanon.

Although there were a few Baptist churches in Lebanon already, the Mousaitbeh Baptist Church is considered the first official Baptist church in Lebanon (with its own building) out of which many daughter churches were planted within a few years.[107] In 1960, Finlay and Julia Graham started the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary.[108] 1963 saw the first group of graduates from Lebanon as well as from other Arab countries. This was a significant milestone. Pastors that were trained theologically were now taking over the leadership of the churches.

Eight representatives from four of the young churches met in 1955 and founded the Lebanese Baptist Convention. These four churches covered a wide geographical area of Lebanon: the Mousaitbeh Baptist Church from Beirut (still existing), the Tripoli Baptist Church from North Lebanon (still existing), the Mieh ou Mieh Baptist Church from South Lebanon (still existing), and the Kfermechki Baptist Church from the Beka‘ area (does not exist any longer).[109]

**Some Observations**

It is important, at this stage, to offer some observations about the life of the early Baptists in Lebanon when the churches were still young and growing.

First of all, as the number of congregations grew from one in 1953 to thirty in 2008, it is worthy to note that most of the converts to the Baptist churches came from an Evangelical background, mostly Presbyterian, or from a Greek Orthodox background. The Baptist churches in Lebanon proved to be less effective with

[106] Sharouk, *History of Baptists in Lebanon*, 58.
[107] Francis, *History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon*, 229.
[108] Ibid., 210.
[109] Ibid., 97-99.

Maronites and almost not effective at all with Muslims.[110] This same observation is made by Lindner about the Protestant Christians back in 1823 to 1860. She states,

> Due to the difficulties faced by the ABCFM missionaries in the Middle East stemming from the Ottoman prohibition against apostasy from Islam, especially Sunni Islam, the ABCFM narrowed their focus onto witnessing to the Christian and occasionally Druze and Jewish residents of the region soon after their arrival.[111]

Secondly, although the Southern Baptist missionaries were instrumental in growing the Baptist ministry in Lebanon, they never took leadership roles in any of the newly-planted churches. Instead, they advised, supported, and encouraged local leaders. They were intentional about identifying potential local leaders and equipping them for pastoral ministry.

The Lebanese Baptist leaders of the church in Beirut met in 1950 in the presence of Finlay Graham. They came up with the following administrative rules for the local Baptist churches:[112]

- The Lord's Supper will be observed once every month, and will be open to the church members only. Members are not allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper in other churches or other denominations.
- Baptisms are performed by pastors, and they automatically lead to church membership. No believer can be baptized without being brought into membership at the local church.
- Marriages are performed by ordained pastors and only to members of the Baptist churches.

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[110] Background analysis on the five sample Baptist churches chosen for my field research is included later in this dissertation.

[111] Lindner, "Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860", 117.

[112] This section was edited out of the final published manuscript of Francis, *History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon*.

- Baptists are to abstain from alcohol and tobacco. Members of Baptist churches are not allowed to sell these products in their stores or offer them in their homes.
- Tithing to be taught and strongly encouraged among church members.
- The church elected six deacons, and with the pastor, all seven served the church. Women were allowed to vote.[113]

Thirdly, the early Baptist churches were involved in ministries with the orphans and the poor. The women's groups took the lead in these social ministries.[114]

Fourthly, it is also important to note that the roots of the Lebanese Baptist Church are highly influenced by dispensational theology. This influence came from the Southern Baptist missionaries that assisted in planting the churches, and from being in close contact with Plymouth Brethren.[115]

And lastly, it is also important to observe that the leaders of the Mousaitbeh Baptist Church, when constructing the first Baptist church building in Lebanon, decided to paint the following verse at the front of the sanctuary in big bold letters: the great commission of Matthew 28:19. Their reasons were that this was the only Trinitarian command given by Jesus, and that this verse was the motto of the Lebanese Baptists then.[116]

**Additional Personal Observations**

I was born in 1960 in an active Baptist home. My father had come to faith in the early 1950s and was one of the early lay leaders in the Baptist movement in Lebanon. My mother came to faith in the late 1950s. I grew up within the Baptist

[113] Sharouk, *History of Baptists in Lebanon*, 46. It was not the norm for women to be allowed to vote on church matters. To this day, women cannot vote in a few Lebanese Baptist churches.
[114] Ibid., 45-46.
[115] Trexler, *Evangelizing Lebanon*, 101-103, 165.
[116] Sharouk, *History of Baptists in Lebanon*, 58.

community; I knew many of the churches, especially as a result of my father's ministry among them; and I was familiar with the Baptist missionary community. The Lebanese Baptist community played a key role in shaping me during my formative years. However, my experience with the Lebanese Baptist churches was interrupted during the civil war and my subsequent emigration to Canada, then resumed upon my return in 2005. Since my return, and as the President of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, I have gained an intimate knowledge of the contemporary Baptist landscape in Lebanon.

Based on my personal experience, I will offer a few observations on the Lebanese Baptist Church's understanding of its role and its mission in its early history.

The Baptist Church understood itself to be a community of believers that exists primarily for the sake of the believers. Church programs were designed for the edification of the believers and for ensuring that the members are kept holy and faithful. Holiness was generally defined as adherence to the norms of the community, whether it is in the way we dress or the way we talk or the way we behave. Holiness was also understood as separation from the world. We were taught to have friends only from inside the church, to do business only with fellow believers if at all possible, and to stay far from the ways of the world and the people of the world. I remember growing up, we did not have a television in our home until I was in my teen years when my father decided to break away from what he considered to be superficial requirements for holiness.

The only meaningful interaction with people from outside the church community was evangelism. Evangelism, and proclaiming the Gospel in general, was understood as verbal proclamation only, usually during formal church meetings, but

also through evangelistic visitations and distributing tracts. These evangelistic methods were fruitful. Many came to faith during that period, and churches multiplied. However, the Baptist Church did not perceive that it had a role in changing societies or in any kind of social or humanitarian work. Evangelism was the means to interact with the surrounding society.

Coming back from Canada in 2005, I did not notice much change in the ministry of the Baptist Church in Lebanon. Churches were experiencing a decline in membership, due to emigration and due to the Church becoming irrelevant to younger educated generations. There were many active and growing ministries and churches at that time, but not inside the traditional Baptist circles. However, the years following that, the churches have experienced a lot of transformation, in thinking, in behavior, and in relating to society. The contributing factors to this transformation are captured in the various case studies in Chapter Three.

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I described the context of Lebanon and the religious backdrop behind the beginnings of the Baptist movement in Lebanon. The unique religious fabric in Lebanon has shaped the motivation and forms of church ministry and it has shaped me. I also included some observations about the life of the churches at the beginning of the movement.

# Chapter Three: Considering Two Data Sets

In this chapter, I present two significant sets of data. Both sets inform my intentional autoethnographic analysis. The first set of data are the results of surveys and interviews I conducted upon my arrival back in Lebanon after my stay in Canada. I present the specifics of collecting information about the Lebanese Baptist Church: the development of the survey and interview questions organized around seven categories of understanding of church, the sampling method used to choose the participating churches and members, and the various documents considered. I then analyze the results in order to offer several characteristics of the Lebanese Baptist Church up until 2011.

The second set of data consists of three case studies: First, of my Canadian experience (1990-2005); secondly, of theological education in Lebanon (2005-2014); and lastly, of how several Lebanese Baptist churches responded in times of significant political, humanitarian, and economic crises (2011 to 2020). The two sets of data inform my lived understanding of the Lebanese Baptist Church and provides the findings I bring into conversation with the Missional Church Conversation in Chapter Five.

## *The First Data Set: Interviews, Church Documents, and Observations*

Given that very little is published that gives a clear picture of the state of the Baptist Church in Lebanon, that I was eager to understand the essence of the Lebanese Baptist Church after being away from it for fifteen years, and that autoethnographic studies expect intentional ethnographic research, it was necessary for me to conduct my own field research.

**Research Method Used**

"Methods impose certain perspectives on reality."[117] Each research method used has a unique line of sight to reality. Combining multiple methods together has allowed me different lines of sight to get a better perspective on the reality of the state of the local Baptist Church. For this reason, I am using triangulation – involving "multiple collection technologies designed to measure a single concept or construct."[118] The three modes that make up the triangulation are interviews, church documents, and observations. For my field research to reflect the inner workings of the Church in Lebanon and what makes it function, a qualitative rather than quantitative research is needed. Although quantitative research has a lot to offer, no matter how arithmetically precise quantitative research is, there is the danger that the outcome would not fit reality[119]. Humans cannot be "studied in a symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion."[120] I expect a phenomenological[121] research to produce better outcomes as it examines attitudes, studies trends, and explores hidden motives behind the visible traditions and behaviors. Qualitative research allows me to access unquantifiable facts as it "properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings."[122] This kind of data collection is also called *ethnography* by researchers. H. Russell Bernard defines ethnography as "the process of collecting descriptive data about a culture,"[123] while J. van Maanen describes it as the method "that involves extensive

[117] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2007), 5.

[118] Ibid., 6.

[119] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford [England] and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[120] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 8.

[121] Phenomenology is the "philosophy of knowledge that emphasizes direct observation of phenomena", as defined by H. Russell Bernard, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000), 20.

[122] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 8.

[123] Bernard, *Social Research Methods*, 318.

fieldwork of various types including participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, document collecting, filming, recording, and so on."[124] My ethnographic research is more of a micro- than macro-ethnography,[125] although consideration is given to both.

Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce note that "[e]thnography is often used in congregational studies when the researcher wants to do justice to the complexity of the situation."[126] According to James Spickard, ethnography "gather[s] people's beliefs, identities, reports of acts, etc. on a deep level." He adds: "it is interested in the extent to which they are shared in whatever socio-cultural scene these people inhabit." Ethnography "is also interested in those scene's hidden patterns: that things that typically go unremarked but that structure the social lives of people living together."[127]

In addition, my research falls under the category of *applied ethnography* due to the desire for this research to affect change among Lebanese Baptist churches and beyond. Margaret Diane LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul define applied ethnographic research as "concerned with understanding socio/cultural problems and using these understandings to bring about positive change in communities, institutions, or groups."[128]

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[124] J. van Maanen, "Fieldwork on the Beat," in *Varieties of Qualitative Research*, ed. J. van Maanen, J. Dabbs Jr., and R. R. Faulkner (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1982), 103 as cited in Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 174.

[125] According to Berg, micro-ethnography focuses on particular "incisions" that look at particular aspects of the group, and more directly and analytically focuses on "face-to-face" interactions with the members of the group. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 174 .

[126] Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion*, Kindle ed. (London: SCM Press, 2013), 332.

[127] James Spickard, "The Porcupine Tango: What Ethnography Can and Cannot Do for Theologians," *Ecclesial Practices* 3, no. 2 (2016): 174.

[128] Margaret Diane LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction*, Kindle 2nd ed., The Ethnographer's Toolkit 1 (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2010), 501.

**Sampling Method Used**

Studying every Baptist church in Lebanon would not allow for an in-depth examination of each church. "[Q]ualitative inquiry often involves investigation of a small number of naturally occurring cases … in order to document complexity."[129] Therefore, a proper method for sampling is needed. There are two kinds of sampling: probability and nonprobability sampling. Probability sampling is when a representative sample of the population is drawn where "every member of that population has a specified non-zero probability of being included in the sample."[130] Nonprobability sampling, on the other hand, is when a researcher does not base his or her sampling on probability theory, but puts effort in creating a quasi-random sample by having a clear idea about how the sample is representing the larger group.[131] "Individual-attribute data require *probability sampling*; cultural data require *nonprobability sampling*."[132] My research is cultural. A random, unbiased sampling does not necessarily yield the most accurate results that represent the larger groups. In order to collect cultural data, "expert informants, not randomly selected respondents,"[133] are needed.

To select a sample of the Lebanese Baptist churches to be examined, I used a purposive, or judgment, sampling.[134] Using my field investigation of the various churches and my growing knowledge and expertise about them, I selected the sample that best suits my purpose. The churches that I selected represent big-city as well as small-town churches; churches in majority Christian areas as well as in majority non-

[129] Martyn Hammersley, "Defining Qualitative Research," in *What Is Qualitative Research?*, The 'What Is?' Research Methods Series (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 13.

[130] A. N. Oppenheim, *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing, and Attitude Measurement*, New ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 1992), 39.

[131] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 43.

[132] Bernard, *Social Research Methods*, 144. Emphasis in original.

[133] Ibid., 175.

[134] Ibid., 176; Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 44.

Christian areas; financially healthy churches as well as needy churches; churches that are more active in the community as well as those that are not as active.

To select a sample of people to interview from each of the sample churches, I used a combination of purposive as well as snowballing sampling. Snowballing sampling is when respondents are selected through a referral process from other respondents.[135] It was essential that the pastor of each church be included in my field research. Therefore, the pastor of each church was selected on purpose. I wanted the rest of the interviewees, however, to represent a particular category of people within each congregation: leaders or active members who are identified as influencers in the church, and whose thoughts and actions help shape the future direction of the church. These are the leaders whose "skill, longevity, and influence put them at the heart of [the] congregation's life," and who "have the best view of the congregation."[136] In addition, I wanted to select a balance in gender and age groups. These interviewees were selected mainly through referrals.

**Research Means Used**

"Understanding a particular congregation is a complex task."[137] Many factors need to be considered when studying a local congregation. According to Craig van Gelder, these include internal factors such as size, ministry style, program model, structure; and external factors such as location, demographics, and community needs. "Local congregations are complex creations of the Spirit that require leaders to exercise sophisticated management and organizational skills to give direction to the

[135] Bernard, *Social Research Methods*, 179; Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 44.

[136] Robert J. Schreiter, "Theology in the Congregation: Discovering and Doing," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman et al. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), 29.

[137] Craig van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 19.

work of the Spirit in their midst."[138] My interest in studying the local congregations is to uncover the implicit theologies[139] and missional characteristics of each congregation, aggregated to come up with a good general understanding of the Baptist missional life in Lebanon.

As mentioned earlier, I used triangulation of three sources to be able to collect meaningful data: interviews, church documents, and observations. I now offer an explanation of each of the three sources.

### *Interviews*

The first vehicle for the field research is a questionnaire that I developed. The questionnaire contains questions that are divided into different topics. I used these questions to get answers from my field research, and, in Chapter Four, I apply the same questions to the Missional Church Conversation. Using the various answers to these same questions constitutes the basis for my concluding contribution of a contextual theology for the Lebanese Baptist Church.

I used the questionnaire to conduct interviews with the sampled people in the sampled churches. The importance of interviews is that they "capture the specific values and meanings an interviewee attaches to a given topic or set of practices."[140] The type of interviewing that I conducted is known as semi-standardized or semi-structured interviewing. This is the type of interviewing where standard questions are prepared but not necessarily adhered to. A more meaningful dialogue is usually the outcome of this type of interviewing.[141] Cameron and Duce affirm that "the most

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[138] Ibid.

[139] "Implicit theologies are theologies or fragments of theologies that inform the congregation's life but are not necessarily acknowledged or overtly expressed," according to Schreiter, "Theology in the Congregation," 31.

[140] Cameron and Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission*, 1547.

[141] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 95; Bernard, *Social Research Methods*, 191.

widely employed interview style in practical theology is the semi-structured interview."[142] I sent the questionnaire ahead of time to the interviewees so that they had the opportunity to come prepared to the interview. This proved to be very useful to the interviewees. They all expressed that they had read the questionnaire and reflected on the questions. Many had written notes on the questionnaire that guided their answers.

The strength of this type of interviewing is that it allowed me to use my standard questions to initiate a dialogue with the interviewees. Each interviewee had the freedom to digress when they felt the need, and I had the freedom to probe further when I felt that my questions were not understood or that more information can be obtained. I used concurrent verbal probing to get more in-depth answers when the interviewees did not offer these answers on their own. Concurrent probing is when the probing questions are embedded within the standard questions and are asked intermittently and not just after the conclusion of the standard questions.[143] However, there is always a potential for bias when asking probing questions.[144] In order to counter this bias, I made an effort to ask non-leading probing questions. I asked clarification questions or paraphrased the answers myself requesting confirmation from the interviewees whether I understood them correctly or not.

I conducted all the interviews myself. The questionnaire was developed in English, but the interviews were conducted in Lebanese Arabic, which is a mixture of Lebanese and English phrases. All interviewees were comfortable expressing themselves in English and Arabic. Consequently, their verbal responses were mixed. I took notes during the interviews and I audio-recorded the discussions (with the prior

[142] Cameron and Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission*, 1547.

[143] Gordon B. Willis, *Cognitive Interviewing: A Tool for Improving Questionnaire Design* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), 51-52.

[144] Ibid., 56.

consent of the interviewees). I then transcribed all the interviews in English using my own translation. Subsequently, I used a qualitative data analysis software, Ethnograph 6.0,[145] to code the data and conduct the analysis.

To facilitate proper coding and analysis, I did a preliminary investigation of the data collected, and I established codes to categorize the answers. These codes became the basis of the analysis, and they proved helpful in categorizing the Missional Church data as well. Some of these analytical categories turned out to be crucial markers in understanding what is being communicated. For example, the categories of *internal* and *external* convey a key distinction in terms of where mission takes place and what activities are considered to be mission activities. Another example is the distinction of *being*, *doing*, and *instrument* or *agency* in understanding the main purpose of the church.[146]

### *Church Documents*

The second source of data from the selected sample churches was an analysis of written church documents: membership application forms, membership covenants, constitutions, by-laws, or texts that are associated with important events in the life of the church. I collected these documents from the church office or pastor's office of each church. I applied the same set of questions from the questionnaire to the collected documents for analysis.

There is a lot of commonality among the church documents of the five churches.[147] They all have a constitution and bylaws. The constitutions are very

[145] http://www.qualisresearch.com/

[146] Refer to Appendix 5 for a complete list of codes.

[147] The five church documents are: ChurchA, ChurchA Official Documents; ChurchB, ChurchB Official Documents; ChurchC, ChurchC Official Documents; ChurchD, ChurchD Official Documents; ChurchE, ChurchE Official Documents.

Any specific piece of information that can be used to identify the church has been removed. The documents years have been removed. The various documents: constitutions, bylaws, covenants, membership applications, have all been merged into one reference. All of this to ensure the anonymity

similar. They define the church by name and location, state its purposes, and present a brief statement of faith. There are some slight variations in the section divisions of the constitutions, but there are many similarities. Even the same wording is used in many of them. It is highly probable that the documents came from a common source.

The bylaws, as well, seem to have come from a common source. There are many similarities in the structures of the bylaws, and they contain similar wording and sentences. The bylaws, however, have undertaken more revisions than the constitutions. One church adopted a minimalist approach and dropped all mention of committees in the church. The other churches have variations in their description of their committees and teams and their respective responsibilities. Two of the churches made major changes to their bylaws. One of them structured its leadership as a matrix group reporting to and assisting the senior pastor. The matrix consists of leaders of various ministries on one axis and leaders of various people groups on the other axis, overlapping in their responsibilities. The other church structured itself around plurality of leadership.

Most of the churches have other defining documents, such as a membership application or a membership covenant.

Overall, when studying these documents, it is easy to ascertain that these five churches belong to the same denominational tradition.

### *Observations*

Finally, I analyzed the physical environment of each church. I commissioned two researchers to visit four of the researched churches. They attended a total of

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of each church. These are public documents and are easily identifiable. Consequently, there will be no specific footnoting of information used from these documents. Otherwise, the specific church can be easily identified.

All church documents are in Arabic. I quote them using my own translation.

fifteen services, including Sunday worships services and mid-week services. I was a member of the fifth church where my observations spanned many years.[148] I prepared a standard form as a tool to collect these observations,[149] and I trained the researchers in using this tool. The tool was designed to observe two main areas. The first area is the structure and architecture: the shape of the meeting space, the pulpit, the chairs or pews, the outside of the building, the doors leading into the meeting space, and any other relevant observation. The second area is the environment and organization: who does what, who participates in the service, who goes up on the pulpit, the extent of participation from the congregation, how guests are welcomed, and how comfortable the meeting space is, physically as well as relationally, in addition to other observations.

**Questions Used in Field Research**

The development of the questions went through a few iterations. I started by developing a preliminary questionnaire in the fall of 2006.[150] Half of the questions in this questionnaire were meant to explore the interviewee's understanding of the role of the church and the other half aimed to explore the interviewee's self-understanding of his or her own giftedness, ministry, and role in the church.

I revised my questions in the next few months and organized them in seven categories or topics in a second draft[151] by 7 May 2007. The aim of each category of questions was to explore the understanding and makeup of the Church from a different angle, although there is a little overlap between some of the topics and

[148] The observers are recorded as: ObserverA, ChurchA Observations; ObserverB, ChurchB Observations; ObserverC, ChurchC Observations; ObserverD, ChurchD Observations; ObserverE, ChurchE Observations. No footnote that can connect findings to a specific observer is documented to protect the anonymity of the research.

All observations were submitted in Arabic. I analyzed them using my own translation.

[149] See Appendix 4.

[150] Supervised by my supervisors at the time. A copy of this questionnaire is shown in Appendix 1.

[151] See Appendix 2.

questions. The seven categories are mission, church, growth and reproduction, leadership, proclamation and discipleship, the role of the Holy Spirit, and ethics. I developed these questions after significant dialogue with key people[152] who helped me think through these questions to come up with well-articulated questions.

These seven categories of questions are by no means exhaustive of what distinguishes a congregation. Other categories can be equally vital to the life of a congregation. Categories such as worship, prayer, Scripture, ordinances, the uniqueness of Jesus, are very important as well. However, after initial review of the missional literature, only categories that were adequately dealt with in the literature were introduced in this research. Enough discussion on these seven categories is present within the literature to provide a framework suitable to be used as a theological tool to inform a conversation. Not much is written on the other important categories that can be used in conversation with the field research. Besides, limiting the scope of the categories allows for more in-depth study of each category.

I wanted to focus on the few categories that significantly distinguish missional churches. Furthermore, even though the focus of many churches that identify themselves as missional has shifted from *doing* to *being* – from methodology to identity[153], my questions intentionally target behavioral elements in the church. My analysis later pushes beyond the surface of the behavior to discover the attitudes and understanding of identity that incite and motivate such behavior.

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[152] My research supervisors at the time, Parush Parushev and Keith Jones, were instrumental in identifying the questions. Both are experts in field research as well as church polity and mission. Another key person that has helped me throughout this research was Perry Shaw. He is an expert in education and research methodology. Two other key individuals who are experts in the Missional Church model of North America also helped me shape my categories and questions. These individuals are Donald Goertz of Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario, and Charles van Engen of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.

[153] Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 34.

I field-tested the second draft of the questionnaire on 11 May 2007. As a result of this field-test, I refined a few questions and added a couple more under the category of leadership in order to capture more details on this central topic. I finalized the questionnaire on 11 June 2007[154] and field-tested it again on 12 June 2007.

I performed the two field-tests the same way as I was planning to do my actual research. I gave a copy of the questionnaire to the person I wanted to interview ahead of time. I scheduled an appointment with each one of them in a quiet office, closed the door, turned my audio recorder on, and started the interview. Each interview took a little more than ninety minutes. I took notes during the interviews and I asked probing questions every time I felt that the answers were not clear or sufficient. I also used techniques identified by Floyd J. Fowler[155] to confirm the validity of the questions. I asked the interviewees to paraphrase the questions to make sure that they understood them. I asked them to define some of the technical terms that I used in the questionnaire. I asked them for any uncertainties or confusion they had in coming up with the appropriate answers. And I asked them how confident they were that they were giving accurate answers.

The field-tests gave me valuable data in what to expect from my field research. First, the answers to the questions were found to be relevant and meaningful. There was enough information in them to be able to assess and analyze. Second, the questions were clear enough and did not require explanation or interpretation. In addition, I also discovered that in these two field-tests, each of the interviewees had two distinct answers for most of the questions. One answer was how they thought their specific congregation would answer the question, and the second answer was

[154] See Appendix 3.

[155] Floyd J. Fowler, *Improving Survey Questions: Design and Evaluation*, Applied Social Research Methods Series V. 38 (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995), 112.

their own. Both interviewees in the field-test were young people who did not necessarily accept their own church traditions or practices as inspired. They answered the questions by describing how they thought their tradition would answer in addition to what their personal answers were. I found this distinction valuable. Consequently, after much thought and consultation with research experts[156], I did not change the questions to limit the answer to one of the two perspectives, the church's or the interviewee's own. I decided to capture both answers to my questions whenever there was a discrepancy between the two. This made the analysis of the answers a little more complex, but the richness of this distinction was worthwhile.

The questionnaire in its final form has the following categories and questions:

### *Mission*

According to Lois Barrett, the definition of a missional church is "a church that is shaped by participating in God's mission."[157] According to this definition that I have adopted for this research, the categories of mission and church are central.

The questions in this category are:

1. What is understood by mission?
2. Who does mission?
3. Where is mission done?
4. How is mission done?

These questions were designed to probe the full meaning of *mission* in relation to the Church. Is it the very nature of the Church? Is it merely an activity of the Church? Who gets involved in it, the commissioned professionals or everyone? Do the activities of mission take place inside the four walls of the church, outside, or a

[156] The same key individuals that helped me frame my questions.
[157] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, x.

combination? How is God's mission accomplished? Further probing questions were asked in the interviews, questions that relate to culture and its relationship to the Church, such as: how do you see God at work in the community, and how do you view the world outside the church?

The fact that the *mission* category was placed before the *church* category in the questionnaire was intentional. When interviewees are asked to think about the church in a vacuum then they are likely to respond from an institutional and organizational perspective. My intention was to get the interviewees thinking about mission when they are asked questions about the church. I wanted any connection the interviewees had in their minds between church and mission to come to the surface.

### *Church*

The following questions are covered under this category:

1. What is the church?
2. What is (are) the purpose(s) of the church?
3. What does the church do to fulfill its mission? Where? When?
4. How is the church organized?
5. What is the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God?

These questions were designed to capture the full and holistic understanding of the church, from definition(s), to purposes, activities, and organization. Is the church viewed as a building or more than that? Is the reason for the existence of the church within itself or outside of itself? Are the identified purposes of the church aligned with that? Does the organization of the church support its purposes? These are the important issues that the questions in this category are designed to explore. The relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God was also explored to find out if any connection is being made at this level.

### *Growth and Reproduction*

The main aim of this category is to find out the understanding of what growth and reproduction are, and to probe the metrics of how success is viewed and how the success of the ministry of the church is measured. The questions in this category are:

1. How should the church encourage growth and reproduction?
2. To what extent is the specific church successful?
3. How is that success measured?

Areas of the discipleship and mentoring were also explored in these questions, mostly through probing and follow-up questions. Questions that invite the person to dream were also asked, such as: what does the church look like when it succeeds? These questions were designed to probe the importance of growth and reproduction to the church, the importance and relevance of discipleship, and the means of assessment, if any, that the church follows to evaluate their ministry, mission, and success.

### *Leadership*

This is the most extensive category of questions. Leadership in the church is very important as leaders are instrumental in positioning the church in regards to the intentionality in other categories. However, I do not attempt to predefine leadership. Rather, I let the definition emerge out of the research. The questions asked in this category are:

1. Who are the leaders of the church?
2. How are the leaders appointed or how do they emerge?
3. How does a church equip new leaders?
4. When do the leaders stop leading or how are they removed?
5. What are the characteristics of a leader? What do they look like?

6. What are their primary responsibilities?
7. How do they lead?
8. How are decisions made?

Further probing questions were also asked in the interviews, such as: when you read the Bible, how do you see Scripture dealing with leadership? The area of spiritual giftedness was explored here as well. These questions are designed to explore what the church understands about leadership and its leaders, about who gets involved in ministry and in decision-making, and how the gifts play a role in all of this. The area of giftedness is also addressed in the category of the Holy Spirit.

### *Proclamation and Discipleship*

Another angle at discipleship was investigated here, with a fuller view on what the "gospel" means. The questions in this category are:

1. What is the Gospel? What does it mean that we are called to proclaim it?
2. How is it proclaimed?
3. How are disciples made?

The importance of his category is to try to correlate the theoretical understanding of what *gospel* is with the praxis of the church. How does theory inform praxis, or what does praxis tell us about the implicit understanding of theory?

### *Role of the Holy Spirit*

The aim of this category is also to probe into the understanding of spiritual giftedness and its impact in the makeup and workings of the Church. The questions in this category are:

1. How does the Holy Spirit work in and through the Church?
2. In particular, how does He lead?

It was important to explore here whether the interviewees made any connection between the Holy Spirit and leadership in the church, and how that was implemented. This included how decisions were made in the church, and the role spiritual giftedness played in ministry and in leadership.

### *Ethics*

No integral analysis of the Church is possible without getting into the crux of the praxis, how the church life is being lived out daily. "Every community has moral convictions that inform how the community lives, which are the ethics of the group."[158] One of the primary roles of the church is to equip its members in how to live in the world. "Equippers encourage a missional ethic by encouraging the community to do good in the world for the sake of the world, as well as to avoid doing evil."[159] The questions in this category are designed to test this and to probe the perceived relationship between the church and the world around it. The questions in this category are:

1. What characterizes a believer? Why?
2. Are there particular behaviors and attitudes that should characterize a believer? If so, what? Why? If not, why not?
3. Are there any behaviors and attitudes that a believer should avoid? If so, what? Why? If not, why not?
4. What should be the relationship between the Church and the surrounding society?

[158] J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Praxis-IVP Books, 2012), 42.
[159] Ibid., 43.

**Local Church Sample**

To choose the sample churches that will be included in my research, I wanted to focus on churches that are active in the Lebanese Baptist Convention. I chose five churches that can be considered urban churches right in Beirut or its surrounding suburbs. The five churches are similar in size, have a common history, and are theologically aligned with each other to a large extent. There are differences, however, in the demographics where each church is located. The five sample churches are described briefly here by name. In order to protect their anonymity throughout the analyses, I gave the five churches the random names of Church A, Church B, Church C, Church D, and Church E.[160]

### *Mousaitbeh Baptist Church*

This church is the oldest existing Baptist church in Lebanon. It started as a home group in 1926,[161] and was officially inaugurated in its own building in 1956. This church became the mother church for all the other Baptist churches in the Convention. The current pastor, Joseph Kazzi was called to lead the church in 1999. Pastor Joseph had been a member of the Hadath Baptist Church before that. The Mousaitbeh church had been without a pastor for a period of fourteen years. The Administrative Committee was covering the responsibility of pastoral leadership during those years.

The church is situated in a Beirut neighborhood that was predominantly Christian before the civil war in 1975. With the demographic changes taking place during the civil war, 1975 through 1990, Mousaitbeh became a predominantly Muslim neighborhood, a mixture of Sunni and Shi'a. The majority of the church's members

[160] The letters given to the church names do not correspond to the order the churches are listed here.

[161] *The Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Ministry Profile*, 20.

no longer reside in its neighborhood. They drive in from Christian neighborhoods to attend church services. This has implications on the way the church engages its community.

### *Bikfaya Baptist Church*

Evangelists from Mousaitbeh Baptist Church started going to Bikfaya regularly for evangelism in 1947.[162] Rizkallah Constantine became the first pastor of the church in 1954,[163] and he stayed as pastor until he emigrated in 1979. Samuel Kharrat, a member then of the Hadath Baptist Church, was called to become its second pastor, and he is still serving there to date. Bikfaya is situated 25 kilometers away from Beirut, with a population of around 20,000 mostly Maronite Christians.[164] Most of the church members live in the vicinity of the church.

### *Ras Beirut Baptist Church*

The ministry in Ras Beirut started in 1954 with the work of evangelists from Mousaitbeh Baptist Church.[165] The first pastor was called to lead the church in 1956. Ras Beirut (meaning the tip of Beirut) is an "upscale residential neighborhood of Beirut."[166] The population of Ras Beirut is a good mixture of Christians, Muslims, and Druze. Even after the civil war, despite the fact that the surrounding neighborhoods are predominantly Muslim, Ras Beirut was able to retain its rich mixture. This is largely due to the presence of many international schools and universities there, of which the most famous is the American University of Beirut.[167] However, because of the civil war, the majority of the church's members have moved

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[162] Ibid., 31.
[163] Ibid.
[164] "Bikfaya", Wikipedia Encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bikfayya (accessed 30 October 2020).
[165] *The Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Ministry Profile*, 22.
[166] "Ras Beirut", Wikipedia Encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ras_Beirut (accessed 30 October 2020).
[167] http://www.aub.edu.lb/

out of Ras Beirut to other Christian areas. As a result, the majority of the church members commute to the church building for meetings.

### *Hadath Baptist Church*[168]

The ministry in the Hadath neighborhood started in 1958 in a home setting as the result of the work of Khalil Ibrahim, an Egyptian evangelist from Mousaitbeh Baptist Church.[169] Ibrahim became the first pastor of the church in 1964.[170] He stayed there until he emigrated in 1976 when Ghassan Khalaf was called from Badaro Baptist Church to become the second pastor of the church. Khalaf retired in 2008 and Hikmat Kashouh, a member of the church, was appointed as its third pastor. Kashouh is still the pastor to this date.

Hadath is a suburb of Beirut. Its population is mostly Maronite Christians with Shi'a and Druze neighboring communities.[171] This church is slowly becoming the largest Baptist church in Lebanon with a wide range of ministries in and around Hadath. A good portion of the members live close to the church building.

### *Faith Baptist Church – Mansourieh*

During the civil war, when Christians in the east side of Beirut could not commute to their home churches in the west side of Beirut, namely Mousaitbeh Baptist Church and Ras Beirut Baptist Church, Faith Baptist was started as a home group in 1976.[172] The church became official in 1977 when it started meeting at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. The Academic Dean of the seminary, David

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[168] Hadath Baptist Church has now been renamed to Resurrection Church Beirut - https://www.rcbeirut.org/.

[169] *The Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Ministry Profile*, 12.

[170] Francis, *History of Baptist Churches in Lebanon*, 281.

[171] "Baabda District", Wikipedia Encyclopedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baabda_District (accessed 30 October 2020).

[172] *The Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Ministry Profile*, 33.

King, was appointed as the first pastor.[173] In 1981 the church felt that it needed a full-time pastor, so George Attieh was called to be the second pastor. He stayed on until the church split in 1996. Since 1996 the church has had a few pastors and long periods without a pastor in-between. Rodolphe Hayek, a member of Badaro Baptist Church, was called to pastor the church in 2011 and stayed on until he passed away in December 2014. The church remained without a pastor until 2019 when Walid Zailaa, a member of Hadath Baptist Church, was invited to pastor the church.

Mansourieh is located 10 kilometers east of Beirut, with a population of around 17,000, predominantly Greek Orthodox.[174] The majority of the church's members live in or around Mansourieh.

**Sample of Interviewees**

Three to five individuals were selected for interview from each of the five sample churches. The pastor was selected, in churches that have a single pastor. The senior pastor was selected in churches that have more than one pastor.

The pastors in all these churches are men. The Baptist Convention in Lebanon to this date does not allow the ordination of women.[175] All five pastors are in "full-time" ministry, but not exclusively pastoring their churches. They are all bi-vocational in the sense that pastoring the church is not their sole vocation. They all teach at a seminary or are engaged in other Christian ministries. None of them, however, is bi-vocational in the sense that they are employed in secular or non-Christian organizations. One of the pastors is paid by a foreign mission organization while the

[173] Rachid Rizzak, "Integrative Research Paper: In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Missional Church Module" (Mansourieh, Lebanon: Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

[174] "El Mansouria, Lebanon", Wikipedia Encyclopedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Mansouria,_Lebanon (accessed 30 October 2020).

[175] Technically, the constitution of the convention does not explicitly exclude the ordination of women pastors. The language used in the constitution to refer to pastors is masculine. However, generic masculine is regularly used in the Arabic language to refer to both genders (refer to footnote on page 99. Nevertheless, in practice, no woman has ever been suggested for ordination in any of the member churches of the convention. دستور مجمع الكنائس الإنجيلية المعمدانية في لبنان.

rest are paid locally, partly through their churches and partly through the other ministries that they serve.

The other members from the churches were selected according to the following profile: active members, having a leadership or influencing position in their churches, and who are likely to contribute to shaping the understanding and vision of their churches. The selection did not include leaders that had shaped their churches in the past. Rather, the leaders that have the potential of shaping their churches for the future were selected. The individuals were selected based on the recommendation of the pastors and of each other. Special care was taken in including different age groups and both genders. All the members selected belong to similar demographics. They all have the same ethnicity. The majority were brought up in Christian homes (not converts from Islam). Two of them were born of Muslim fathers but were raised as Christians by their Christian mothers. All member interviewees are well-educated and serve in various professional fields. They are all homogeneous in terms of their ethnicity, upbringing, and social and educational level.

The following table shows the breakdown of the interviewees by the groupings that are most relevant to this research.

| Church | Age Group | Gender | Position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Church A** | Above 50 | Male | Pastor |
| **Church A** | Above 50 | Male | Member |
| **Church A** | 30-40 | Female | Member |
| **Church B** | 30-40 | Male | Pastor |
| **Church B** | 30-40 | Male | Member |
| **Church B** | 20-30 | Female | Member |
| **Church B** | 20-30 | Female | Member |
| **Church C** | Above 50 | Male | Pastor |
| **Church C** | 30-40 | Female | Member |
| **Church C** | 30-40 | Male | Member |
| **Church C** | 30-40 | Male | Member |
| **Church D** | 30-40 | Male | Pastor |
| **Church D** | 40-50 | Female | Member |
| **Church D** | 20-30 | Male | Member |
| **Church D** | 30-40 | Male | Member |
| **Church D** | 30-40 | Male | Member |
| **Church E** | Above 50 | Male | Pastor |
| **Church E** | 40-50 | Female | Member |
| **Church E** | Above 50 | Female | Member |
| **Church E** | 40-50 | Male | Member |
| **Church E** | 40-50 | Male | Member |

**Table 6 - List of Interviewees**

In performing my analysis on the interview data, I sought to capture when there were differences in respondent answers on the basis of age, gender, position held or specific church. I point these differences out as I find them, or mention that none were discernable.

## *Findings: Characteristics of the Lebanese Baptist Church (to 2011)*

In this section, I present the findings organized by the seven categories and the various questions within each category. I systematically consider the responses to each of the questions addressing each of the three sources of research: the data collected through the interviews; the analysis of church documents, mainly the constitutions, bylaws, membership application forms and covenants; and the data collected through observations. All quotations cited in this chapter are my own

translation[176] of what was said or written. Sometimes I change the wording of the answers to protect the anonymity of the individuals and of the churches[177]. At the end of the presentation of the findings of each question, I offer a brief analysis. And, at the end of each of the seven categories, I offer my critical reflections of the findings.

**Mission**

### *What is understood by mission?*

#### Interviews

Only one of the respondents, a pastor, hinted that mission is the nature of the church: "God sent his son, *missio Dei*. I think mission is a culture, not just one doing mission. We are missional."[178] Another respondent, a member of the same church, considered mission as a lifestyle: "Our lives as disciples of Christ is a mission… wherever he calls us. But our whole life should be a mission."[179] The vast majority, including the pastor mentioned above, considered mission as a function of the church. Some described this function as fulfilling God's plan; some considered it as the great commandment or the great commission or both; some considered it as proclaiming the gospel, or reconciling man to God; and some as reaching out to others.

It is worthwhile to note that when the interviewees were asked questions about the church the answers did not include mission. Only when asked specifically about mission that answers were provided. The interviewed churches mainly saw mission as one of the functions of the church and not necessarily as its very nature.

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[176] A note on the translation of Arabic content to English. Generic masculine is widely used in Arabic, in the official documents as well as in the spoken language. Refer to footnote on page 99. I did not attempt to make the English translations inclusive except where the context makes it clear that both genders are intended.

[177] Such as replacing the name of the church with a pronoun, "my" church.

[178] Interviewee17, interview by author, 15 April 2011.

[179] Interviewee20, interview by author, 18 April 2011.

One of the pastors explained what the traditional understanding of mission was when the churches were planted: "We're used to, in Lebanon, to think of mission as someone coming from outside. Missionary coming to serve us."[180] One of the members of this same church still understands mission as the work of full-time missionaries: "a missionary is really someone ultimately dedicated himself, left his job and other things, and dedicated himself to proclaim a message which is multifaceted."[181] Another member of this church made the distinction between how she understands mission and how she believes her church understands mission. She sees mission as the great commission while she believes that her church "is not up to this level." She explains: "I think that we're a bit absorbed inside as a church. Of course, we teach this mission, but I don't feel that we're living it in our training and our everyday work in the church."[182]

In contrast, there was a more discernible alignment in another church between what the members understood about mission and what they believed their church understood. One of the members explicitly stated that: "I think that this is not only my belief, this is the church's as well."[183]

There were no other significant variations in the answers provided based on church, position in church, gender, or age group.

### Church Documents

The term *mission* is used only once in the official documents of all five churches. The context for using this term in the one church is *mission* as in the *mission* of the church, or the mission statement of the church. In this mission

[180] Interviewee14, interview by author, 4 April 2011.
[181] Interviewee18, interview by author, 15 April 2011.
[182] Interviewee16, interview by author, 12 April 2011.
[183] Interviewee20, interview.

statement, this church seeks to describe the surrounding community around the church building with its social, religious, ethnic, cultural, and educational levels. The mission statement encourages the church to understand its surroundings and to present the Gospel to their neighbors in relevant ways.

Beyond this one mention of the term *mission*, all five churches use an Arabic term خدمة (khidma) that can be translated into English as either *ministry* or *service*. The textual context in the documents suggests that the term is used mostly for internal church purposes. The use for external purposes is the exception. The terms *evangelism* and *proclamation*, however, are found in the documents of all five churches. Although there are no stipulations or structures in any of the five documents to support the churches in *doing* "mission", there are structures for doing ministry, service, evangelism, and proclamation.

### Observations

None of the observations made by the researches in all five churches includes any mention of mission or can provide meaningful data for the churches' understanding of mission. We cannot conclude from this that the churches are not interested in mission. Rather, we can conclude that either this research tool was not sufficient to gather data for the area of mission, or the churches did not communicate a clear focus on mission during the church services when the observations took place.

### Analysis

The research shows that there is a development in the understanding of what mission is among the sample churches from what they traditionally believed. Some have advanced in their thinking more than others.

The primary understanding of mission among the churches is that mission is one of the functions of the church, and not necessarily at the core. In addition, the

respondents' answers show that the individuals understand mission as a comprehensive *way of life*. However, the formal organization of the churches reduces the meaning of mission to proclamation and evangelism, and mostly lack the structures needed to carry on this function. The churches' formal documents show mission as something peripheral and not central. The lack of discernible observations of the *practice*, or even mention, of mission corroborates that. The theoretical understanding among the interviewees of a comprehensive mission as a function of the church does not seem to be aligned with the life of the churches.

### *Who does mission?*

#### Interviews

The majority of respondents stated that everyone in the church is supposed to be doing the work of mission. "Every Christian, supposedly, hopefully",[184] "everyone, I think, should do whatever he can where he is"[185] were typical answers. A few respondents stated that the work of mission is that of the specialized or commissioned individual. "Not everyone. I think there should be appointed people by the church who have the work of mission on their heart, they have people on their heart"[186] was an answer by one of the pastors. "Specific people that the church decides on and puts strategy and goals."[187] One respondent answered both, that everyone in the church should be on mission but there is a specific need to "have formal structure to send missionaries abroad."[188] The various answers came from different churches, age groups, genders, and positions.

[184] Interviewee2, interview by author, 18 March 2011.
[185] Interviewee12, interview by author, 31 March 2011.
[186] Interviewee14, interview.
[187] Interviewee12, interview.
[188] Ibid.

### Church Documents

None of the documents of the five churches answers this question explicitly. One of the churches, in its statement of faith, under the article about the ministry of the church, stresses that the two pillars for doing the ministry of the church are the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All five churches, under the article about the duties of members, stress that all members are expected to "serve, or minister, according to their gifts"[189].

One of the five churches has a committee for evangelism, with a stipulation in the bylaws that allows the formation of new committees or teams when needed. Another church has a committee for evangelism and a committee for philanthropic assistance. Their bylaws also have stipulations for forming new teams when needed. Another church has no mention in its documents of any committee beside the administrative committee. All the committees of the other two churches are for internal purposes, although one of them has a position of Coordinator of Evangelism and has a stipulation for new committees or teams if needed.

### Observations

No meaningful data was gathered in the whole area of mission.

### Analysis

Again, when asked specifically about who does mission, many answers were given. The majority believe that the role of mission is for everyone, or a combination of everyone plus the need for the work of the specialized and commissioned. But there is no official structure in place to support such an understanding, and there is no observable evidence of such practice.

[189] All five constitutions have the exact same wording for this phrase of the article.

The majority of respondents affirmed that the work of mission is everyone's responsibility. There is a discrepancy, however, in the fact that the thinking and behavior of the individuals seem to be discordant with the structure and behavior of their church communities.

### *Where is mission done?*

#### Interviews

All the respondents answered that the work of mission is done outside the church or in all spheres of influence. Twelve also indicated that the work of mission takes place inside the church as well. "Everywhere. I believe that the mission should be done inside the church, outside the church, in our daily life, at our schools, universities, work, that's where mission happens."[190] There is no difference in answers among the various categories of respondents.

#### Church Documents

There is no explicit mention in any of the official documents of all five churches of any ministry[191] taking place outside the church building. All mentions of evangelism or service are imprecise and not clear whether they refer to internal or external ministries.

#### Observations

No meaningful data was gathered for this category.

#### Analysis

Although the understanding of all interviewees is that ministry should take place outside the church building, there are no formal structures in these churches that

[190] Interviewee13, interview by author, 31 March 2011.

[191] Since mission is not mentioned in the church documents, I also explored the use of the word "ministry" as a possible indicator of mission work. Refer to the analysis of the responses to the first question in this category.

support external ministries. Additionally, there is no evidence that the interviewees see themselves as the missionaries sent to their own spheres of influence to do the work of mission. It seems that the understanding of the location of mission is incongruous with the lived reality.

### *How is mission done?*

#### Interviews

Most of the responses to this question included an *inside* answer. The way mission is done is through inside ministry or training or prayer or teaching/preaching or Sunday school or evangelistic meetings. This is a typical answer: "The mission of our church starts inside the church. We begin teaching them the word of God."[192] All the respondents, however, included an *outside* answer. The way mission is done is through outside visitation, community involvement, collaboration with others in ministry, lifestyle witnessing, proclamation of the word, social or holistic involvement, and church planting. One pastor answered: "We sit down drinking coffee, wherever we are, in Starbucks, everywhere, we proclaim Christ. In my work, in my life."[193] One respondent mentioned cell groups as an inside/outside activity.[194]

Three interviewees from the same church, including the pastor, understood mission to include visitations. They were referred to as evangelistic visitations: "So, of course if I want to do evangelistic meetings or evangelistic visitations, I would be doing work of mission."[195] There were no other specific differences in answers based on the profiles of the respondents.

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[192] Interviewee3, interview by author, 21 March 2011.
[193] Interviewee17, interview.
[194] Interviewee11, interview by author, 30 March 2011.
[195] Interviewee12, interview.

### Church Documents

Although all five churches in their official documents have one of their stated purposes as "serving God and others" and "proclaiming the Gospel", none of the churches has a clear structure in their bylaws to provide a framework for implementing that. All ministry that is external to the churches, when it happens it occurs more on an ad hoc basis than planned for and structured at the formal level of the churches.

### Observations

The observers noted that evangelistic sermons and evangelistic events were referenced in the meetings, with no explicit connection to mission.

### Analysis

There is clear understanding among the individuals interviewed that the work of mission includes lifestyle and activities outside the four walls of the church building. However, the praxis remains at the level of the individuals. The churches themselves do not recognize any act of mission beyond a limited number of evangelistic activities. There are no identifiable means by which the churches educate and train their congregations on being on mission outside the walls of the church.

#### *Critical Reflections*

It is evident that the understanding of mission is developing among Lebanese Baptist churches. The churches were planted with the help of foreign missionaries. The concept that Lebanese Baptist churches are recipients and beneficiaries of the work of mission remained central to the thinking and praxis of these churches for a long time. This has also influenced a subtle distinction that mission is foreign, ministry is domestic. By the time that I conducted my field research in early 2011, the understanding of mission among the churches had changed, in some churches more

than others. The churches started to understand their own responsibility in *doing* mission, but not as much in *being* missional, and not much mention of *missio Dei*. The churches' organizational structures, and praxis, had not caught up to their changed understanding. The preaching and teaching in the churches equipped the members to live a good Christian life, that mission is a lifestyle of witnessing. However, there was no clarity in what that meant or how it can be accomplished. No intentional means were yet created in the churches to promote or empower the work of mission. It was largely left for ad hoc activities and for the personal understanding of each individual.

## Church

### *What is the church?*

#### Interviews

All the respondents defined the church within the category of *being*, as the community of believers, the body of Christ, the people of the Kingdom, "the group whom God reigns on through Christ Jesus."[196] Only three respondents included in the definition the *doing* aspect of the church. "It's a group of people that work together under the cover of Jesus to accomplish his purposes,"[197] "it's a group of believers who proclaim Jesus as head,"[198] and "all have one goal or many shared goals and are working to fulfill it".[199] All three respondents that included a *doing* dimension are men. None of the respondents used the language of church as an *instrument* or *agency* in their definition.

[196] Interviewee17, interview.
[197] Interviewee19, interview by author, 16 April 2011.
[198] Interviewee15, interview by author, 6 April 2011.
[199] Interviewee12, interview.

### Church Documents

All five churches have a similar statement of faith in their constitutions. The article about the church defines it as "a community of local believers who gather for worship, witness, and service (or to do ministry)." And, "the church is an extension of Christ on earth, so it has to represent Him as best it could and it should be a conscience for the world, provide a model to it, and work for its good in a ministry of love." The words that express the article of faith about the church are almost identical in the constitutions of all five churches, except for one that skipped the part on being gathered for worship, witness and service. It replaced it with a separate article that defines the church as "the body and bride of Christ; a spiritual, living, organic being; interacts with the living word of God, and with the Holy Spirit who gives life and guidance; and interacts with its surrounding through worship, teaching of the word, discipleship, proclaiming the living Gospel, and serving society."

### Observations

The formal church meetings suggest that the church is the community of believers. It is about the people *being* the church. This is not a surprise since the observations took place when the congregations were gathered for worship or Bible study. There was not enough data collected through this research tool to discern whether the teaching and preaching in the churches focused more on the *being*, the *doing*, or the *agency* of the church.

### Analysis

It seems that the churches believe that their reason for existence is themselves more than it is for outside of themselves. The *being* is more important than the *doing*. The fact that the respondents who included *doing* in their answers are males suggests that their answers may be driven more by their urge to be productive than by regular

teaching on the church's role in *doing*. In addition, the *doing* is mostly internal to the church rather than external. A typical answer to the definition of the church is "We are a community of believers, gathered for … (internal reasons)". I did not detect a definition that goes along the line: "We are a community God's people on a *mission*."

### *What is (are) the purpose(s) of the church?*

#### Interviews

The top responses to this question included internal purposes for the church, such as edification and worship. "The place where God is present, so it's the place of worshipping God… Its goal is the growth of believers… if the believers are not being edified properly, I think there will be a weakness."[200] The majority of respondents indicating worship as a key purpose are less than forty years old. Most respondents considered proclamation and witness as a primary purpose. "This is our purpose to fulfill that mission, which is to evangelize the world"[201] was one answer. Serving others was indicated as an important purpose as well, mostly among males. "Loving the neighbor and the stranger"[202] was a typical response. A few respondents identified the church's purpose as fulfilling God's plan. This is a representative response of this category: "The church is the unit or entity that God was able to work through in the society. This is the only goal that the church should get to is to fulfill God's will in its community."[203] The majority of the responses of the purpose of church as service or fulfilling God's plan came from males.

[200] Interviewee10, interview by author, 30 March 2011.
[201] Interviewee16, interview.
[202] Interviewee20, interview.
[203] Interviewee1, interview by author, 18 March 2011.

### Church Documents

Four of the five churches have an almost identical definition of the purposes of the church, which are fourfold: "First, worshipping God and practicing the ordinances; second, teaching the Christian principles that are taught in the New Testament and obeying them in daily life; third, leading the world to Christ; and fourth, serving man and society as the Bible teaches." One of the four churches adds the purpose of "building the believers on the foundation of the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people." The fifth church describes the purpose of the church through its mission statement. After defining its context and the people that it aims to serve, its mission is to "[p]resent to the people in [their] neighborhood the message of the Gospel in word and deed, through understanding the community with all its specificities and needs, in a manner suitable with the context. On the other hand, the mission of the church is to edify the believer through worship, Bible study, prayer, brotherly fellowship and discipleship."

### Observations

The practices during the formal services suggest that the purposes of the church are: to worship and pray; to teach, preach, and edify the believers; to train the believers on how to live a holy Christian life; to promote some kind of fellowship and hospitality; and to evangelize new comers.

The size and setup of the church buildings and meeting halls – four out of the five churches own their church buildings – encourage the gathering aspect of the church and suggest that what happens within the buildings is very important.

### Analysis

It is evident that the main purposes for the church in people's understanding are internal purposes that can be summarized in worship, congregational care and

serving the community of the believers. The churches' structures, environments and activities strongly support these purposes. There is strong evidence as well that the Churches understand their purpose of proclaiming the Gospel to people and serving others. The structures, environments, and activities suggest, however, that it is understood that these purposes can be fulfilled through internal activities. Not much beyond evangelistic visitations can be discerned externally.

Again, in this category, it seems that Lebanese men tend to think of more functional and utilitarian purposes than women do. This is in line with research of Arabs in leadership. Zahi Yaseen cites various research in the workplace that affirm that Arab men tend to be more task-oriented whereas Arab women tend to be more interpersonal-oriented.[204]

### *What does the church do to fulfill its mission?*

#### Interviews

The top responses were of internal ways that the church can fulfill its mission. "Our strategy, number one, is to build up people, church people in the faith, through teaching, prayer, involving them in ministry,"[205] said one pastor. Many of them thought that the church fulfills its mission by congregational care, and the rest by other programs inside the church. "Then, one more thing, maintenance. Some people trip while in the field. They fall down. You follow up with them, help them out, straighten them"[206] added the same pastor. Three pastors specifically identified preaching and teaching as primary ways for their churches to fulfill their mission. The

[204] Zahi Yaseen, "Leadership Styles of Men and Women in the Arab World," *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues* 3, no. 1 (2010): 65.
[205] Interviewee2, interview.
[206] Ibid.

majority of the interviewed members of these churches did not agree with their pastors.

Another main response was that the church fulfills its mission by having its members involved in its various ministries, whether ministries geared towards the inside of the church or ministries geared towards the outside. Only a minority thought that home groups were the way the church can best fulfill its mission. Some respondents clearly defined outside community involvement as the best means for the church to fulfill its mission, although this may not be happening adequately, as stated by one respondent: "We need to be more involved in our community to know the needs and know how God wants to use us in our community. We need to evaluate a bit our surrounding to know what truly we exist for."[207]

### Church Documents

Although the official church documents, namely the constitutions and bylaws, specify the purposes of the church, they are relatively silent about the programs or activities that the churches perform to fulfill the stated purposes. There is nothing in the documents to correlate the activities of the church back to the stated purposes. Four of the churches list the meetings of the church, worship meetings and business meetings. The wording for the worship meetings is similar among the four churches, describing the worship meetings as "First, worship meetings take place weekly on the Lord's day, or on any other day the church selects. Second, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is practiced at the times the church selects. Third, the ordinance of baptism is practiced as needed. Fourth, other meetings for evangelism or teaching or other conferences are held as needed."

[207] Interviewee1, interview.

Four of the churches list the committees and teams of the church and describe their roles and responsibilities. The readers of the documents need to make an effort to link the responsibilities back to the purposes of the church. No direct connection is made in the documents. The majority of the structures described are for internal purposes. Only two churches specify structures for evangelism, one of them also for philanthropy. It is not made clear, however, whether these structures satisfy internal or external purposes.

### Observations

The formal meetings are structured in a way to accomplish some of the internal purposes of the churches: worship, preaching, teaching, fellowship, evangelism. Nothing could be observed by this research tool that can indicate what the churches are doing to accomplish external functions.

### Analysis

The main structures, environments, and activities of the churches support well the internal purposes of these churches. However, these structures, environments, and activities are lacking when it comes to engaging the external communities. There is the understanding that the more involved members get in the various ministries of their churches the more the churches would be fulfilling their mission. The outside world is not always present in the consciousness of the members. There is also the conviction among the pastors that the churches fulfill their mission through proper preaching and teaching. The members of the churches do not seem to agree with that. Many have described the need for outside community involvement but admitted that this is not happening adequately. The churches do not have the structures or frameworks needed to accomplish that.

### *How is the church organized?*

#### Interviews

Four main categories emerged out of the answers to this question. The first category is structure, whether the church is viewed as an organization or an organism. The second is leadership, whether the church's leadership model is perceived by the members as plurality in leadership or as solo leadership. The third is ministry involvement, whether the respondents thought that the members are highly active in ministry or not. And the fourth is decision-making, whether the members thought that their church is inclusive in decision-making or decisions are primarily made from the top down.

Not many respondents were able to comment on the area of structure. The answers mainly came from two congregations, with a high level of alignment in thinking within each of these congregations. One of the churches described itself more like an organization. One respondent described their structure this way: "Very traditional in our structure. There's a pastor, administrative committee, leaders… we have management concerning financial management…"[208] Another expressed confusion over structure: "instead of the structure helping you do your mission now it's more a confusing thing for the mission."[209] The other church described itself as functioning more like an organism. One respondent described it this way: "The team leader, with a discussion with the pastor, appoints the members of the team. They're not voted by the church anymore."[210] There were no clear answers about how their church structure is perceived by the respondents of the rest of the interviewed churches.

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[208] Interviewee16, interview.
[209] Interviewee21, interview by author, 18 April 2011.
[210] Interviewee17, interview.

The majority of respondents, however, had something to say in the area of leadership. There was high alignment in this category as well among respondents from the same churches. Three of the churches recognized that they are led by a solo leader. The pastors of two of these congregations agreed with this response. The pastor of the third church remained silent about it. One of the respondents commented: "As church management, there's the pastor, he's the person who has the most important position in church who directs the meetings and general assembly, then under him is the administrative committee."[211] The other two churches identified having plurality of leaders. The pastors of these two churches agreed with this assessment. One respondent commented: "in principle, we are designed to have multiple leadership, plurality of elders, structure."[212] Another respondent saw both leadership types manifested at different times.

Only half of the respondents commented on the area of ministry involvement in the church. There was a high level of alignment in the responses coming from two of the churches. One church saw itself as having a high level of involvement in ministry among its members. "Everybody is involved, everybody is happy,"[213] commented one respondent. "There's no one working alone I think,"[214] commented another respondent. The majority of these responses came from interviewees who are less than forty years old. The other church identified a low level of involvement. "There isn't a clear church strategy, or we don't have the whole church involved in these ministries."[215] Four of the pastors did not volunteer a response on the level of involvement in ministry.

[211] Interviewee12, interview.
[212] Interviewee11, interview.
[213] Interviewee4, interview by author, 21 March 2011.
[214] Interviewee9, interview by author, 29 March 2011.
[215] Interviewee10, interview.

There was a high degree of alignment in the category of decision-making as well. Three of the churches clearly thought that decision-making at their church is inclusive of many levels of leaders. When asked about *spiritual* decisions, one respondent answered: "We don't decide this in administrative committee. Everybody in general assembly will have something to say about something like this."[216] All respondents, including the pastor, from the fourth church agreed that their decision-making comes from the top down. This is how the pastor described their situation: "We don't have a constitution like other churches because I don't believe that the church should run with institutional thinking, constitution and bylaws. I cancelled the constitution of the church, removed it, and we made a document and got rid of constitution and bylaws."[217] No clear answers for this category were given by the respondents from the fifth church.

There is a clear correlation in the responses between plurality of leadership, high involvement in ministry, and inclusive decision-making.

### Church Documents

The organizational structure, according to the formal church documents, varies from one church to the other, sometimes slightly and in some cases considerably. In all five churches, however, the final decision belongs to the General Assembly. That is where the ultimate authority lies, not in the church leadership and not in external denominational structures. The official documents are very clear about the autonomy and independence of the church from the authority of external bodies.

The formal structure of one of the churches allows for one single Pastor who leads all the areas of the church assisted by an Administrative Committee, various

[216] Interviewee12, interview.
[217] Interviewee14, interview.

committees and teams, and other ministry leaders such as a Treasurer, a Secretary, and a Sunday School Director. The ministry teams report back to the Administrative Committee as well as to the General Assembly.

The structure of another church allows for a single Pastor who leads the church, assisted by an Assistant Pastor and a Church Council or Ministry Council. The Church Council is made up of all the ministry leaders in the church. The term of the Assistant Pastor ends with the term of the Church Council. The church also has a Board of Elders whose role is only spiritual, precisely prayer and intercession. This Board does not have any administrative or teaching responsibilities.

The structure of the third church allows for a single Pastor, assisted by multiple Assistant Pastors, local ministers, a council for pastoral care, a council of deacons for administrative purposes, and council for the office of the pastor, and various committees and ministry leaders.

The structure of the fourth church allows for a single Pastor who is assisted by an Administrative Committee. There is no mention in the documents of this church of other committees or ministry teams.

The last church has a unique structure. This church believes in the plurality of leaders of the church and justifies it Biblically in the documents. At the head of the hierarchy of the church are three ministers: A Teaching Minister, whose responsibility is preaching and teaching; a Pastoral Care Minister, whose responsibility is shepherding; and an Administrative Minister, whose responsibility is management and administration. According to the formal structure, the minister who has the most seniority at the church is considered as the first among equals. He represents the church externally. The church also has an Administrative Team that reports to the Administrative Minister. In addition, the church has various ministry committees and

teams. It is not clear to whom these teams report. This church is the only one that describes the General Assembly and how it functions. The General Assembly has the ultimate authority in the church.

### Observations

By observing what happens during the formal church services, it is obvious who the leaders are. The church services are clearly led by a few. The majority of the congregation are passive spectators. They get involved in singing and praise, and sometimes in prayer, but passive otherwise. Even during question and answer periods in Bible study meetings, the majority of attendees remain silent and unengaged. The setup of the meeting halls encourages this behavior. All these halls have a podium, usually a one-meter-high podium, with a huge solid-wood pulpit that hides the speaker behind it, and rows of pews or chairs facing the pulpit. The leaders, whether the teacher or preacher or song leader, stand in a position of authority and speak with authority while the masses listen. During Bible study, the podium is not usually used. The large pulpit is replaced with a small lectern that is placed on the floor in front of the congregation. The congregations remain physically passive and unengaged nevertheless.

When participating in the Lord's Supper, the same behavior is observed. One of the leaders of the church conducts the ordinance while all others are recipients.

There is more participation in young adult meetings, however. The setup of these meetings is different. Chairs are arranged in a round or square formation. In addition, the leaders present themselves more as mentors and coaches rather than as sources of authority.

### Analysis

The churches function mainly as organizations. The organizational structures are mostly hierarchical and fixed. The governing documents are traditional and do not have flexibility. Two of the churches have significantly changed the form and content of the governing documents. Nevertheless, they remain fixed and lack flexibility. Their documents are not living documents that can be easily enhanced or modified. Most of the committee members and ministry coordinators and teams are elected by the General Assembly on an annual basis[218]. Ministers voted in by the General Assembly can only be removed or replaced by the General Assembly. This does not give the churches enough flexibility to respond to their changing realities during the year.

One of the churches is experimenting with a matrix-type leadership that is inclusive of many cross-sectional leaders. This structure somewhat gives flexibility in ministry but still falls within a hierarchical structure and is accountable to the pastor.

This is all at the leadership level. Many ministry teams within the churches are able to function with more flexibility, reporting to the leadership teams.

In the area of leadership, all the churches have a single pastor as the top leader. Even the church that articulates in its documents its belief in the plurality of leaders, two of the three positions of minister remain vacant and the church is led by the only pastor in office. This church has not been able to recruit or grow leaders into these minister positions. Assistant pastors, leadership teams, administrative teams, church councils, elders, boards of deacons, and ministry leaders "assist" the pastor in his work. This top-down leadership approach does not necessarily imply an authoritarian rule, and, therefore, should not be viewed as a weakness in leadership structures. Even

[218] See the section on appointing leaders on page 100.

though four of the church structures stipulate a solo leader and the fifth church practices it due to lack of incumbents, nine of the interviewees considered that they have plurality of leadership in their churches. This leads me to conclude that we can find within the top-down structures of the churches many indicators of empowerment and decentralized decision-making. This conclusion is supported by the fact that two thirds of the interviewees considered that decision-making in their churches is inclusive of many levels of leadership. Some referred to examples of a consultative approach to top-down decision-making.

The correlation between practiced plurality in leadership, inclusive and decentralized decision-making, and high level of involvement in church ministry is evident. What is also evident is that the five churches are not homogeneous in these categories. Some have become more inclusive while others still have remains of a traditional solo rule[219].

### *What is the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God?*

#### Interviews

The range of answers to this question are spread and not specifically clustered among certain churches or other respondent categories. Most of the responses were descriptive answers to this question. Some considered the church as an agent of the Kingdom, "the church is the means of extending the Kingdom."[220] Another respondent described it this way: "[the church is] the responsible or appointed to fulfill [the Kingdom of God]."[221] Some believed that the church participates in the Kingdom. "The church represents the Kingdom of God on earth, and it is part of the

[219] All references to the pastor of a local church in the constitution of the Convention of the Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon are in the singular. دستور مجمع الكنائس الإنجيلية المعمدانية في لبنان.

[220] Interviewee5, interview by author, 23 March 2011.

[221] Interviewee16, interview.

Kingdom of God in heaven,"[222] said one respondent. Another said: "[the Kingdom of God] is living through us and we can be automatically light and salt for everyone around."[223] "I believe that the church is the Kingdom of God now but not at full form, representation of it, but not fully"[224] is the way another respondent described it. Some respondents considered the role of the church is to witness for the Kingdom, to proclaim the Kingdom. "The work of the church I think is the spreading of the Kingdom of God"[225] was a typical answer. One respondent described disappointment with the state of the church today: "in general our churches are in a weak state in this area."[226]

### Church Documents

The language of the Kingdom is mostly absent from the official church documents. Three of the churches mention the Kingdom of God in their statement of faith in the article about eschatology. The wording is the same for all three churches: "The believers share with Christ in His glory in the Kingdom of God." One of the three churches mentions the Kingdom in another paragraph as well: "We believe that every believer is a priest in the Kingdom of God." A fourth church mentions the extending of the Kingdom of Christ as a direct outcome of collaboration among churches and other ministries. In addition, one church mentions the Kingdom of God in the new member's pledge stating that the new member pledges "to be active in extending the Kingdom of God." No direct connection is made in any of the documents to the relationship between the church and the Kingdom of God.

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[222] Interviewee1, interview.
[223] Interviewee7, interview by author, 24 March 2011.
[224] Interviewee15, interview.
[225] Interviewee10, interview.
[226] Interviewee13, interview.

### Observations

The observations made by the researchers using this research tool do not provide data concerning what the churches believe about the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God.

### Analysis

In my own assessment after conducting the interviews and analyzing the data, the concept of the Kingdom of God is not forefront in the awareness and consciousness of the individuals in the churches. When asked a direct question about the Kingdom of God, respondents were able to come up with thoughtful answers, but they do not naturally think about the Kingdom when they are living out their normal lives. This assessment is confirmed by the absence of Kingdom language from the church documents. When asked, interviewees were able to relate the Kingdom of God to the task given to the church in proclamation. No reference was made to the transformation of societies as one aspect of this proclamation.

### *Critical Reflections*

The Baptist churches in Lebanon functioned in survival mode since their start in the middle of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first century. Things started to change recently with the major influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon as a result of the war in Syria.[227] What is meant by *survival mode* is when churches are mostly involved in serving their own communities, where ministry is primarily concerned with congregational care, or self-care, and when not much attention is given to what lies outside the boundaries of the church.

[227] The impact of the refugee situation on the churches in Lebanon is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Ziya Meral, a specialist on politics and foreign policies in the Middle East,[228] analyses the socio-political factors since the Ottoman Empire that forced Middle Eastern Christians to behave the way they do.[229] Sociologically, Christians in the Arab world are perceived as a minority, and politically, they are perceived as "domestic expressions of the enemy, even though Arab, Turkish, and Persian Christians share the same political views and patriotism with their Muslim compatriots."[230] In Lebanon, Christians are not as much a minority as in other Arab countries. Nevertheless, Lebanese Christians share many of the same anxieties with other Christians in the region.

In response to the prevailing socio-political forces, Ziya suggests that the Church can react in one of three ways; resignation, emigration, or engagement. Resignation, or 'inner immigration', is when the Church is pushed out of mainstream society and is progressively marginalized. This is when the Church goes into survival mode, no longer concerned with reaching and transforming societies, but concerned with safety, security, and survival.

According to Ziya, the resignation reaction eventually leads to the emigration reaction. Physically leaving the land into more welcoming societies can restore hope for the future of families.

Until the start of the Syrian conflict in Lebanon, only a small portion of Christians experienced the engagement reaction, engaging with their societies from the margin despite difficulties and opposition.

The respondents' answers were consistent with the realities of living against such a socio-political background, experiencing the Church as *being* rather than

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[228] Ziya Meral, "Biography" http://ziyameral.com/biography-1/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

[229] Ziya Meral, "Change and the Church: What Is Needed for the Local Church to Survive and Thrive in the Turbulent Mena?," in *SAT-7 Network* (2010). Cited with permission.

[230] Ibid.

*doing*, and focusing on ministries that are primarily internal. The church members' thinking affirms this reality, the formal structures of the churches affirm this reality, as does the observed behavior.

**Growth and Reproduction**

*How does the church encourage growth and reproduction?*

Interviews

In response to this question, the interviewees indicated that teaching and preaching are the primary means for growth and reproduction. All five pastors considered that their teaching and preaching contributes to the growth of their churches. According to one pastor, the first factor for growth is "by my contribution in teaching."[231] Another specified "uncompromising teaching."[232] This focus on teaching and preaching was affirmed by the interviewed members as well. One member stressed that growth comes "of course in preaching and Bible study that we have in our meetings."[233] Another member was more specific in identifying "teaching about being witnesses for Christ in the daily life as lifestyle."[234] One member recognized that preaching and teaching are "effective but not enough if there isn't follow up." She added, "whatever the sermon is, if it's not followed by discussion, what did this person understand?"[235]

Another top response to how the churches encourage growth and reproduction was thought to be involving members in ministry: "encouragement to be involved in ministry so that the person grows as well."[236] It is important to note that the majority of interviewees that gave this response are members are not pastors. In addition, this

[231] Interviewee3, interview.
[232] Interviewee14, interview.
[233] Interviewee18, interview.
[234] Interviewee9, interview.
[235] Interviewee10, interview.
[236] Interviewee9, interview.

response was given primarily from two churches. These are the same two churches that in their responses to how they thought their churches were structured[237] showed complete agreement that their church structures allowed and encouraged high involvement by the members.

Respondents also highly attributed growth and reproduction to modeling, mentoring and discipleship, although mostly random and not organized: "Mentoring happens, very rarely organized. We get mentoring just because of spending time with each other,"[238] said one respondent. It is important to note that only one of the responses came from a pastor who had mentioned discipleship in passing when discussing teaching: "when I say teaching, I mean discipleship, preaching, all these things."[239]

The rest of the responses to how the interviewees' churches encouraged growth and reproduction were scarce and spread among the areas of congregational care, visitation, active equipping of members for ministry, evangelism, home groups, and prayer. Only one interviewee identified prayer as a means by which the church encourages growth and reproduction: "the absence of it hardens people's hearts and the abundance of it changes people."[240]

### Church Documents

There is no explicit mention of how growth and reproduction are encouraged in the five churches, and whether the growth and reproduction are internal and organic, or external through missional initiatives or church planting. There is one mention of the word "growth" in one of the church documents, in the statement of

[237] Refer to the section on how the church is organized on page 77.
[238] Interviewee9, interview.
[239] Interviewee3, interview.
[240] Interviewee19, interview.

faith under the article of baptism: “The Christian belongs and grows in faith through commitment to the local church.” There are two mentions of the word “edification”. The first mention is in one of the purpose statements of the church: “Edifying the believers in faith.” The second mention is in another church’s document in the paragraph that outlines the ministry of the church: “The church takes care of the civil affairs of its members and works on edifying their spiritual lives.” One church expands on the article on the external relationships of the church. The church collaborates with other churches and ministries to “grow the relationships and the spirit of love and service and support, and to exchange church experience for the sake of extending the Kingdom of Christ and the spreading of the work of the Gospel in Lebanon and the world.”

There is stipulation, however, in the documents of all five churches for evangelism and proclamation, even in the purpose statements.

### Observations

All the researched churches hold their meetings in meeting spaces that are much larger than the attendance, giving the perception that there are always expectations to fill more chairs.

### Analysis

When the word *growth* is used in churches in Lebanon, it can mean many things. When the growth is qualified as the growth of believers, then naturally this refers to individuals’ growth in their Christian walk. However, when the growth is qualified as church growth, then the common understanding is that the term is referring to numerical growth in the church.

The first category, the individual growth, was addressed in the responses and church documents. One of the main stated purposes of the churches is to study the

teachings of the Bible or New Testament and to encourage obedience. That is growth. The main vehicle for doing that, according to the interviewees, is teaching and preaching. Although the pastors were unanimous in the direct contribution of their teaching and preaching to growth, not all the interviewed members agreed. Some attributed growth to the modeling and mentoring that takes places at church, even though it happens randomly and without formal structures. Additionally, some attributed growth to getting involved in ministry. When members are given the opportunity to get involved in ministry then that helps them grow.

The second category of growth is church growth, or numerical growth. The expectation is that if more people are coming, attending, and listening, some must come to faith and others benefit and grow. This numerical growth is very much embedded in the understanding of the churches. All evangelistic meetings, visitations and home groups have that as the target.

The third area of growth and reproduction is in missional activities that are external to the church. This category of growth is largely absent from the thinking and activities of the churches.

### *To what extent is it successful?*

#### Interviews

The most common response to the question of the churches' success in growth and reproduction was moderately successful. One pastor described it this way: "We're not very successful in growth in quantity. Spiritually, I think that our people can now discern the message."[241] One of the members commented: "to a certain extent. We can improve."[242] Another member attributed his response to numerical growth: "I can say

[241] Interviewee14, interview.
[242] Interviewee6, interview by author, 24 March 2011.

successful to a good extent because during the years we always have newcomers to the church, not just people coming from other churches. New believers, new blood."[243]

Some evaluated their church's attempts at growth and reproduction as not successful, at least in some areas. One respondent said: "Spiritual growth, I think it's very weak."[244] Another said, "not fully successful."[245] A third respondent answered, "Overall, not. It's a bit random. I don't think in terms of growth that enough is being done at the level of the church."[246] None of the pastors evaluated their church's growth and reproduction as not successful.

The least number of interviewees identified their church's growth and reproduction as very successful, including three of the pastors. One pastor said: "Very much. That's my conviction."[247] Another: "100%".[248] The third pastor said: "I think we're doing well."[249] Some members agreed: "Yes, I think it is successful. I say around 90% successful."[250] But the majority of the members did not agree with this assessment.

Many respondents, while attempting to answer this question, indicated that their church has recently embarked on a new journey. Hence it might be too early to measure the success in a meaningful way. One pastor, describing their journey, said: "We haven't done it enough to see the fruits of it, but it's happening."[251] The majority of these respondents who recognized their church's new journey are under forty years of age.

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[243] Interviewee12, interview.
[244] Interviewee16, interview.
[245] Interviewee15, interview.
[246] Interviewee10, interview.
[247] Interviewee2, interview.
[248] Interviewee17, interview.
[249] Interviewee3, interview.
[250] Interviewee7, interview.
[251] Interviewee17, interview.

#### Church Documents

The official church documents are silent about the theme of success. Nothing is mentioned, explicitly or implicitly, that can be used to answer this question.

#### Observations

In terms of numerical growth, one of the churches is showing steady increase in its attendance. The rest of the churches tend to maintain their numbers, or even show some decline in attendance.

#### Analysis

The evidence shows that the churches are not being highly successful in the areas of growth and reproduction. One indication is the interviewees' own perception. The majority of them thought that their churches are being moderately successful or not successful at all. The few interviewees, mostly pastors, who thought that their ministry was highly successful, their assessment was not matched by their members' assessment. Another indication is the observed lack of growth in attendance in most of the churches.

There is evidence, on the other hand, that the churches are starting to respond to the meager growth and the decline in attendance. Many respondents indicated that their churches had just embarked on a new journey of change, thus making it difficult to make an accurate assessment this early in the journey. Some churches are recognizing that there is a problem to be addressed, and they have started on their journeys of change.

### *How is it measured?*

#### Interviews

The majority of respondents considered their churches are successful in growth if the lifestyle of their members is changing. "First of all, change in lifestyle.

God gave us signs in the Bible which show if an individual is growing in grace and other,"[252] said one respondent. One of the pastors answered: "by the evidence in the lives of people."[253] Another pastor answered: "If these values that we're developing, really are biblical values, and the people can stick to them and live them out, I think we're successful."[254] A third pastor answered: "The measure is our faithfulness and what we can do."[255] It is important to note that four pastors indicated that growth could be measure by a change in lifestyle. What is also interesting is that the majority of those who gave the lifestyle response are men, most of whom are under the age of forty.

A large number of respondents considered that their church is successful in the area of growth and reproduction when more members get involved in the ministries and activities of the church, "involvement and commitment and time given even time in thinking"[256] as indicated by one respondent. Another said: "How much the people of the church are doing the work that's the measure of our success."[257] One pastor affirmed that "[s]uccess is in the commitment of people."[258]

A few respondents indicated numerical means of measuring success. One pastor affirmed that the basis of success is "seeing the movement that's happening in the church, seeing the presence of people more, the church attendance more, the commitment of the people is more, enthusiastic more, people that are enthusiastic about their relationship with God."[259]

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[252] Interviewee16, interview.
[253] Interviewee2, interview.
[254] Interviewee17, interview.
[255] Interviewee8, interview by author, 28 March 2011.
[256] Interviewee10, interview.
[257] Interviewee1, interview.
[258] Interviewee14, interview.
[259] Interviewee3, interview.

A small number of respondents connected success with the level of giving at the church. One member thought that success is reflected in "the way they serve and give."[260]

### Church Documents

There is no explicit mention of assessment, evaluation, or any kind of metrics anywhere in the formal church documents of all five churches. The documents do not include any explicit quantitative or qualitative measurements that define the success of the ministry. However, implicitly, the church documents place high expectations on Christian maturity and obedience (qualitative growth), and evangelism (quantitative growth).

### Observations

The common external perception of success of churches is the number of church meetings they have and the number of attendees in each church service. If more people come to the church services, then that means growth of the ministry. If more people are baptized and become members, then that means success. However, the behavior of church members is not always aligned with these perceptions. One of the researchers who visited two of the churches to observe and collect data expressed that he did not feel welcomed particularly in one of the churches. The fact that people are looking for numbers does not always translate into behavior that encourages more people to join.

### Analysis

It is obvious that there is no culture of assessment in the churches. There is no agreement in what it means to be successful in ministry. When conducting the

[260] Interviewee6, interview.

interviews, this question did not have a ready answer among the interviewees. They had to think through it and they came up with answers that seemed logical to them. It seems that this is not an area that has been discussed and talked about in the churches. Regardless, the answers were thoughtful even if varied. Numerical growth, growth in involvement in ministry, and exhibiting Christ-like lifestyles, all these can be healthy measurements for a community of believers. What is still lacking is any kind of measurements or metrics for external missional activities of the church community. The area of growth is more present in the consciousness of the church than the area of reproduction.

### *Critical Reflections*

The research shows that the category of growth, although not always well defined, is an important marker of a healthy church for Lebanese Baptists.

I discovered a striking but unexpected finding while analyzing the data. As stated earlier in the chapter,[261] I carefully selected seven categories of questions when designing the questionnaire. These categories are by no means exhaustive of what is important for church. I left out key categories that are vital for the life of the church. I only selected the categories that are present in the Missional Church Conversation in order to have a valid comparison. Nonetheless, other key themes emerged in the interviews. For example, the questionnaire did not contain specific questions on Scripture or on the importance of preaching and teaching the holy text. Consequently, this theme was not specifically explored while probing during the interviews. In spite of that, the theme of teaching and preaching came out strong in response to how the interviewees thought their churches encourage growth and reproduction. This was the top answer for that question. However, other main themes that were not explored in

[261] See page 48.

the interviews did not emerge, such as the theme of prayer. Only one interviewee identified prayer as a tool that churches use to encourage growth and reproduction.

On another note, in response to the question on success, young people were hesitant to give a response when they thought that their churches were embarking on a new journey of change. It seems that the younger interviewees are looking into the future to measure their success rather than looking back into the past. This paints a hopeful picture of the church. Young active leaders, who may be more concerned with the future wellbeing of their churches than older members, saw change as something positive. They were looking with anticipation to what outcomes the change will bring.

It is important to make a note here about assessment, evaluation, and metrics in a church ministry. Should there be an assessment of impact or outcome? Should the church be more concerned with the 'means' or the 'ends', or maybe a mixture of both? Christopher Wright, speaking at a conference on impact in theological education,[262] makes the case that the Bible is concerned with outcomes. The Bible has a lot to say about 'ends'. If ends are important, then planning for impact is important. Outcomes matter. However, Wright provides warnings along with his assertions: "Counting and measuring, however, can be ambiguous or dangerous." He adds: "Being over-concerned with measurable results can lead to *boasting*." This is the problem with defining 'success'. Timothy Keller makes the same point about success:

> More than other idols, personal success and achievement lead to a sense that we ourselves are god, that our security and value rest in our own wisdom, strength, and performance. To be the best at what you do, to be at the top of the heap, means no one is like you. You are supreme.[263]

[262] Chris Wright, "Effectiveness and Impact in Theological Education from a Biblical Perspective," in *ICETE C-15* (Antalya, Turkey: 2015).

[263] Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*, Kindle ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

Quentin Wesselschmidt, in an editorial, affirms that on the one hand, numerical success is "indigenous to Christianity."[264] The Old Testament is filled with numbers, and so are the gospels and the book of Acts. However, he adds the warning that "there is always the danger that this is simply a secularizing of the ecclesiastical organization and a transforming of the church into a modern business institution."

## Leadership

### *Who are the leaders of the church?*

#### Interviews

Responses to this question were widely spread. The most popular answer was influence. The respondents considered as leaders of the church those who have the most influence. "Basically, the leader is anyone who influences the life of others"[265] was a typical answer. One respondent went to the extent of recognizing that everyone is a leader at one level because everyone influences someone.[266] One of the pastors said that "everyone that has following behind him or her is a leader or potential leader."[267]

Some respondents considered as leaders in their churches the functional leaders, or de facto leaders, those who are actually doing the work and making decisions on the ground. The majority of these answers have come from the same church and are describing a model of team leadership that has been adopted in their church. One member stated that "ideally, the leader is the one that is serving the most."[268] The pastor of that church affirmed that "the ministry leaders, they are

[264] Quentin F. Wesselschmidt, "The Church and Success," *Concordia Journal* 10, no. 1 (1984): 1.
[265] Interviewee11, interview.
[266] Interviewee15, interview.
[267] Interviewee17, interview.
[268] Interviewee9, interview.

leading the church."[269] A pastor of another church agreed that the leaders of the church are those who are functionally leading on the ground. He considered "everyone in the church with a specific role as a leader."[270] His church, however, does not seem to agree with him on this point. No other member of the church gave a functional answer to this question.

A few respondents viewed the pastor as the leader of the church. Two of these respondents are pastors. This is how one of the pastors responded: "One person carrying the vision to the church is enough. No need for the extra maze. If the people believe in the pastor, who is the leader, they don't need a lot of details to come along."[271] A few members of this same church agreed with their pastor. One of the members recognized that major decisions in their church are taken "solo by the pastor."[272]

A few respondents viewed leadership in their churches as positional leadership, the leaders are those who have a position of leadership. "The pastoral team, the deacon board, and the ministers"[273] was one typical answer.

Only two of the respondents viewed the leaders in their church as those who use their spiritual gifts in ministry. Both are pastors. One of them answered: "I empower men in the church who have gifts of leadership at different levels."[274] The members of their church did not seem to agree with them.

### Church Documents

By definition, official documents such as constitutions and bylaws identify the positional leaders of the church, with the exclusion of other people of influence. Four

[269] Interviewee17, interview.
[270] Interviewee3, interview.
[271] Interviewee14, interview.
[272] Interviewee18, interview.
[273] Interviewee8, interview.
[274] Interviewee2, interview.

of the five churches identify the top leader as the Pastor, assisted by… depending on the specific structure of the church. The fifth church has three Ministers as the top positions, out of whom the one with seniority takes on the role of representing the church, the leader among equals. As with the other churches, these ministers constitute the top tier of the church hierarchy.

The language of the documents of all five churches uses the generic masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to the leaders. Such is the practice when writing in the classical Arabic language[275]. This does not necessarily mean that all leaders have to be men, except for the position of pastor, which, as described earlier[276], has been strictly a male position. One of the churches makes it clear in its bylaws, under the section "Pastoral Leadership", that leading is the responsibility of men. Another church also refers to the pastor as the "brother", thus making it explicit that the pastor is a man. The gender of the other leaders is not addressed in these documents, with one exception. In the bylaws of one of the churches, when describing the Board of Elders who have a spiritual intercessory role, the bylaws explicitly state that the members of this board can be both men and women.

### Observations

Analysis of the observations revealed a perception of leadership at two different levels. All those involved in the meetings, on the pulpit, or on the ground welcoming people, were viewed as leaders, leaders of ministries or representatives of the churches. Those who were teaching or preaching, however, were viewed at a higher level of leading, providing Biblical teaching and direction to the churches.

[275] "Arabic, as in most gender languages, masculine is used as the generic grammatical and lexical form, that is, the masculine forms are used to allude to persons whose gender is unspecified." According to Ángeles Vicente, "Gender and Language Boundaries in the Arab World: Current Issues and Perspectives," *Estudios de dialectología norteafricana y andalusí* 13 (2009): 11.

[276] See page 59.

### Analysis

There is no doubt that the structure, as well as the practice, of these churches is hierarchical. The official documents prescribe that, the interviews affirm that, and the researchers' observations confirm that. There is no question about who the top leader in the church is. The Pastor. There is no question either about who constitutes the second-tier leaders in the church. The various churches refer to them differently, as Administrative Committee, Board of Deacons, Church Council, or something similar. These two levels of leaders combine both positional leadership and functional leadership. In addition, the churches seem to recognize another category of leaders at the churches, those who have influence. When asked, it was not difficult for the church members to identify who the influential leaders were in their respective churches.

### *How are the leaders appointed or how do they emerge?*

### Interviews

When answering this question, only one respondent referred to the appointment of the pastor. None of the other respondents, including all the pastor interviewees, made any reference to the appointment of the pastor. Their answers referred to the other leaders of the church: leadership committee, administrative committee, deacons, ministry leaders, or whatever name they gave to these committees, but not the pastor.

The responses for this question were quite diverse. The most popular response was that the leaders are appointed by a pastor or by a committee. One respondent's answer: "Committee leaders are appointed by the deacons with the approval of the pastor or the leadership team, pastor and elders."[277] Another member described the

[277] Interviewee11, interview.

appointment: "We have the system of committees which are appointed by pastor/leadership team."[278] Another member stated that "administrative committee appoints them."[279] None of the respondents whose answers fit the *appointment* category was a pastor. The only respondent who referred to the appointment of the pastor himself clarified that the "pastor is appointed by church general assembly."[280]

Another popular response was that the leaders emerge by their own initiative in ministry. They take an initiative, start doing ministry, and thus prove themselves. "I feel that the person that takes initiative people rely on him and he emerges as a leader."[281]

Many respondents thought that leaders are recognized at an early stage based on skills, gifts, character, and ministry experience. One respondent described the process this way: "[The pastor] would see a potential in someone and would ask him to see if this person has the passion for this ministry."[282] A pastor's response was: "I sat down with everyone and found out what gifts they have."[283] The majority of responses in the category came from interviewees under the age of forty.

A few respondents answered that their leaders are elected. "Administrative committee usually by election. Nomination is usually by the pastor."[284] Nominations can also be made by other leaders, and sometimes general assembly, in the five churches.

One of the respondents made a distinction between how he thought leaders are selected in his church and what he thinks the right way should be. He stressed on the

[278] Interviewee15, interview.
[279] Interviewee5, interview.
[280] Interviewee11, interview.
[281] Interviewee9, interview.
[282] Interviewee7, interview.
[283] Interviewee17, interview.
[284] Interviewee6, interview.

importance of prayer, the role of the Holy Spirit in the selection, and giving the opportunity for everyone to be tried and tested in ministry.[285]

### Church Documents

According to the official church documents of all five churches, leadership can be categorized into three levels. The first level of leaders is the pastors. The second level of leaders is the assistant pastors, church council, or administrative committee. The names vary from one church to the other. The third level of leaders is the committees and ministry leaders. There are many similarities in how leaders are selected in the various churches at each level.

For the top-level leaders, other leaders at the church, sometimes with the inclusion of key members, form a search and nomination committee. Not much is mentioned about the qualifications of the candidates. Candidates are presented to the church and voted on by the church. In four of the churches, the top leader is elected by a vote of seventy-five percent of members present. The fifth church requires a vote of two thirds of all registered members.

Second-level leaders are mostly elected through a voting process. The Assistant Pastor in one church is appointed by the Pastor after consultation with Church Council. All churches are consistent in requiring the second-level leaders to be of good repute and be experienced in ministry.

The selection process of third-level leaders is varied among the five churches. Some require voting and others do not specify any details about the selection process. There are a few key responsibilities mentioned for some of the positions, but mostly they do not detail the qualifications needed for each role. One church specifies that leaders are appointed according to their gifts.

[285] Interviewee19, interview.

### Observations

The researchers who visited the churches observed that younger leaders are being given the opportunity to teach, preach, and lead worship. This indicates that new emerging gifts are being encouraged and tested, and opportunity is being given to the young talent to mature in ministry and in leadership.

### Analysis

I find it remarkable that when inquiring into who the leaders of the church are (the previous question) there was no doubt that the pastor is considered to be the top leader, while when inquiring into how leaders emerge only one respondent referred to the appointment to the position of the pastor.

Bylaws of all five churches stipulate that a selection and nomination committee should be formed when the position of a pastor is vacant. This may lead to the belief that top-tier leaders are sought after externally rather than emerging from within. It is interesting to note that the pastors[286] of two of the five churches grew up in their churches. Two of the five pastors are leading churches where they likely came to faith and where they had matured and served for many years. This proves that the potential for leaders to emerge from within is present among the churches. This principle stands true for the other leadership levels as well. It is made clear in the documents of all the churches that the leaders have to have good reputation and are experienced in ministry. This encourages initiative taking and helps potential leaders in their growth and maturity in ministry. This fact is affirmed by the interviewees, many of whom had identified that leaders emerge by their own initiative or are recognized as they get involved in ministry. In addition, the fact that most of the young interviewees thought that leaders in their churches are recognized based on

[286] At the time the research was conducted. One pastor has passed away since.

their skills and gifts, this is a positive sign that they feel encouraged that their churches are watching and looking for new talent.

### *How does the church equip new leaders?*

#### Interviews

The answers to this question can be classified into four categories. The first category is formal intentional, meaning that there are regular formal training programs for emerging leaders such as workshops, seminars, and courses. The second category is formal random, meaning that formal training is given at the church but randomly and not on a regular basis. The third category is informal intentional, meaning that the church has regular and focused training for emerging leaders using informal means such as one-to-one mentoring, coaching, and apprenticeship. The fourth category is informal random. This is when the mentoring, coaching, or apprenticeship takes place on a case-by-case basis and not on a regular basis.

The majority response was that leadership training at the interviewee's churches is mostly informal and random. A typical answer was: "I don't know of anything intentional. Sometimes the pastor might see certain abilities and gifts in individuals that he wants to nurture and he wants to give them some opportunities to encourage them."[287] One of the members said that potential leaders in their church "sit down a bit with [the pastor], he gives them a few books, not more."[288] One of the pastors said: "I don't know that we have a specific program of equipping leaders except by modeling, advice."[289] The responses of four of the five pastors fell in this response category.

[287] Interviewee11, interview.
[288] Interviewee21, interview.
[289] Interviewee2, interview.

The rest of the responses were split between formal intentional and formal random. Some thought that their churches have formal, structured, and intentional training for leaders. “Starting soon, possibly next week, leadership training. We will be taking a session once month or so, a session on a specific topic that helps us with leadership.”[290] Another member affirmed that “anyone in any position of leadership has to come to the leadership training, this is number one. Number two, home group leaders that are being launched now they have to attend home group leadership training, they need to learn how to lead home groups.”[291] These answers were concentrated in two of the churches.

Those who answered in the formal random category thought that leadership training in their churches is done more on a random basis. One respondent, a pastor, described their training: “There can be training as needed, such as in music. This is internal training.”[292] Another respondent said: “Usually the church has no problem sending to conferences, workshops, etc. One of the strengths of our church is that it doesn’t say no to anything that will improve the ministry and develop the ministers.”[293] Respondents in this category come from three different churches.

Only one respondent thought that their church has structured and intentional informal training, mentoring new leaders informally. A few respondents thought that there is no training or equipping of leaders at their church. All three came from the same church; none of them is the pastor. “We don’t have that”[294] said one respondent. “Not much. There isn’t anything,”[295] said another.

[290] Interviewee9, interview.
[291] Interviewee20, interview.
[292] Interviewee8, interview.
[293] Interviewee10, interview.
[294] Interviewee18, interview.
[295] Interviewee16, interview.

### Church Documents

Four of the churches, in describing the responsibilities of the person in charge of Sunday School, these responsibilities include preparing new individuals for this ministry. One of these four churches, in describing the responsibilities of the person in charge of the youth or young adults, one of their stated responsibilities is to "prepare various programs and material to train the youth or young adults on taking responsibility and to discover and enhance their gifts." Two churches have a committee for training and conferences. One church mentions training as one objective of the worship services. One church expects its Pastor and Assistant Pastors to continue their theological training.

### Observations

The observations of the researchers who visited the various churches provide no evidence that there is any kind of formal training. However, as mentioned in the observations of the previous question, the researchers were able to observe that emerging leaders are given the opportunity to engage in ministry, which implies that they are getting on-the-job training.

### Analysis

It seems that the majority of training for new leaders takes place in an informal and unstructured way, on-the-job training. It takes place through relationships and through mentoring and guidance by more senior leaders. There are avenues for more formal training for some. Sunday School teams in two of the churches provide training for new teachers as part of their responsibilities. A few churches arrange for workshops or send potential leaders to conferences. This does not take place regularly. Only when there is a felt need. One of the churches formally requires its pastor and assistant to go through formal theological training.

### *When do the leaders stop leading or how are they removed?*

#### Interviews

The majority of respondents said that ministry leaders are removed as a result of an evaluation done by the pastor or the leadership team. If the leader deviates from the vision of the church, cannot fulfill the commitment made to the role, or simply does not have enough time for the ministry, these are grounds for removal. One pastor commented: "The person that we put in charge of service was not doing anything, so another leader took his place."[296] One respondent commented that they have a fixed term for their leadership team, but the pastor's time is indefinite.[297]

Many respondents asserted that the time of service for the leader, mainly the pastor, is indefinite. Some attributed this to the limited pool of candidates for leadership: "the majority stay not because we're going by force of inertia, but because we don't have the high number in the church and every time people like to elect a certain individual."[298] As for the term of the pastor, one member commented: "we don't have a policy in this. We also wait for the pastor to say that he wants to do something else."[299] One pastor commented on his own appointment: "the election that took place was indefinite."[300] Some remarked that even the timing of the administrative committee is indefinite, "eternal,"[301] as described by one respondent. They leave "when they die"[302] commented another.

[296] Interviewee17, interview.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Interviewee12, interview.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Interviewee17, interview.
[301] Interviewee13, interview.
[302] Interviewee16, interview.

A few respondents declared that their leaders stop leading when they resign. Others stated that leaders should be removed when there is sin in their lives. One respondent suggested that leaders usually leave because of conflict.

### Church Documents

According to the formal documents that govern the churches, one of the five churches appoints its pastor for a fixed term. The period is not specified in the bylaws. The other four churches appoint their pastors for an indefinite period. All five churches have stipulations for ending the contract with the pastors, either upon their resignation, or upon the request of the church.

Second-level leaders in all five churches are appointed for a fixed term with the possibility of renewal. There is no mention in the bylaws of whether the term of these leaders can be ended prematurely.

There are no details about the conditions and terms of the third-level leaders at these churches.

### Observations

There was insufficient data gathered by the researchers using this tool to give an adequate answer to this question.

### Analysis

The history of the five churches[303] confirms that pastors do serve for quite a long time. The most common reasons for leaving are emigration and retirement. This is affirmed by the bylaws of four of the five churches that specify the pastors' period of service as indefinite. However, serving long term is not exclusive to the top-tier leaders. Even though the bylaws specify fixed terms for the second-tier leadership

[303] Refer to the Local Church Sample section on page 56.

structures, leaders at this level tend to stay for a long time. Essentially, leaders do not stop leading unless they choose to leave.

### *What are their primary responsibilities?*

#### Interviews

This question did not generate enough meaningful answers. The expectation from this question was to try and discern whether the interviewees thought that leaders did most of the work themselves, they encouraged and coached others in doing the work, or they merely provided direction. Did the leaders lead through chairing committees, or through teaching and preaching, or through what means? It seems that the interviewees did not find these distinctions relevant. Almost half the interviewees, including half the pastors, did not directly answer this question.

All of the interviewees who responded to this question thought that the main responsibility of the leader is to lead. "Equip and set example and lead people within their areas of responsibility, not manage."[304] "The leader should be the one who focuses them."[305]

A few respondents thought that the responsibility of the leader is to go *do* ministry. "A leader is someone who rolls up their sleeves and starts doing in front of everybody. They're doers as well."[306] None of the pastors explicitly state that.

A few respondents thought that the main responsibility of the leader is to equip others for ministry. "Their job is to see who has the ability to do the work, equip them if needed, give them the work to do."[307] None of the pastors explicitly states this role either.

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[304] Interviewee11, interview.
[305] Interviewee9, interview.
[306] Interviewee11, interview.
[307] Interviewee1, interview.

### Church Documents

According to the official church documents, the primary responsibilities of the top-level leaders are consistent among all five churches. They include teaching, preaching, shepherding, and leading the churches in all their ministries, spiritual and administrative.

The responsibilities of the second-level leaders are mostly administrative duties, assisting the top-level leaders in running the ministries of the churches.

The responsibilities of the third-level leaders vary based on their areas of ministry. They are given the responsibility of leading their own ministry, and sometimes recruiting other members of the team. They are accountable for their responsibilities to the church through the second-level leaders or the first-level leaders or both, depending on the ministry and on the church.

### Observations

No meaningful data was gathered for this question through this tool.

### Analysis

The primary responsibility of pastors is to lead, and pastors believe that their primary tool for leading is through teaching and preaching. Pastors are also expected to be doers of *ministry*, meaning that they are expected to get involved, to get their hands dirty. It is obvious, also, that ministry leaders are expected to lead their respective ministries, and second-tier leaders are expected to handle administrative and financial leadership in the church. Spiritual leadership is mainly left to the pastor. The dichotomy between what is spiritual and what is not can still be detected in the churches. The validity of this dichotomy can be questioned. Dean R. Hoge, Professor of Sociology at the Catholic University of America, makes the distinction between churches that understand finances through a *fund-raising approach*, which consider

finances as means to support the programs of the church, and a *stewardship approach*, which consider finances as a spiritual activity.[308] These researched churches still considered finances as an administrative service rather than a spiritual service. The top-tier leader is responsible for spiritual matters while the second-tier leaders are responsible for administration and finances.

### *How do they lead?*

#### Interviews

In response to the question of leadership style, the top responses showed that all the researched churches had some elements of empowerment. Leading by empowering others was the top answer. One respondent said: "We're learning how to work in teams, and the decision comes out of the team."[309] A ministry leader in her church expressed that "[the pastor] trusts us [and] he gives us the full authority to go and do whatever we want."[310] One pastor expressed the style of leadership at their church: "The person in a position of leadership knows what's expected of him, and he takes the decision. Some things they come back to me. Some things I go back to the committee."[311]

Many respondents thought that the style of leadership at their church is authoritarian. One of them said that decisions are made by the pastor "when there are things that he feels driven to do."[312] Another framed his answer this way: "if [the pastor] is convinced of something he tries to market it to the congregation. The

[308]Dean R. Hoge, *Money Matters: Personal Giving in American Churches* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 85.

[309] Interviewee7, interview.

[310] Interviewee16, interview.

[311] Interviewee8, interview.

[312] Interviewee5, interview.

congregation has two choices, either they buy into his marketing, or he does it anyway."[313]

A few respondents declared that their church's leadership style is by modeling, by being an example. One pastor encourages his leaders "to be a model and blessing."[314]

### Church Documents

The official church documents do not prescribe specific leadership styles and do not describe how the responsibilities are to be undertaken. Although the documents specify responsibilities of the pastor, the committees, and the members, there are no descriptions on relationships between the various entities of the churches. Besides, there are no descriptions of decision-making mechanisms within the churches. It is left to each church to figure these things out among themselves.

### Observations

Some elements of empowerment can be observed during the formal meetings of the churches. New leaders are given opportunities to serve and gain experience. At the same time, and as expected by the people, senior leaders do act as top leaders. They are there whether at critical times of the services or at the door greeting people after the services.

### Analysis

Leadership and decision-making styles in the churches are often affected by the host culture. The cultural context of the churches in Lebanon puts an expectation on the top leaders of the church to act as top leaders. A highly pertinent study was conducted on contextual leadership of Lebanese executives and comparing those of

[313] Interviewee21, interview.
[314] Interviewee8, interview.

them living and working in Lebanon with those working in Gulf states and in the United States.[315] Muna A. Farid affirms that "leaders use different styles that are more congruent with their own cultural values."[316] She finds that leaders in the Middle East in general can be described by three characteristics:[317]

1. Paternalism: Tribal, familial, or clannish leadership style. The leader is regarded as the *father* of the community.
2. Personalized Approach: Preference for personal over impersonal approach. Emotions and feelings matter. Personal factors are taken into consideration. Trust and loyalty as important as efficiency.
3. Autocratic/Consultative Decision-Making: Decisions are made by leaders after frequent consultation of subordinates. Their opinions may or may not influence the decision. Delegation is not often used.

The leadership style highly affects the way decisions are made. The impact on decision-making will be discussed while analyzing the responses to the next research question.

Farid's description of leaders is affirmed by this research among Lebanese Baptist churches. It is clear in the churches who the top-leader is, who the *father* figure is. At the same time, it is evident that the pastors are striving towards a culture of empowerment. Pastors are trying hard to find the right balance between fulfilling the expectation of being *the* leader who provides stability and security to the community, and between their conviction of the need to empower others. The churches' bylaws also expect the pastor to be the top leader who is ultimately

[315] Muna A. Farid, "Contextual Leadership: A Study of Lebanese Executives Working in Lebanon, the Gcc Countries, and the United States," *Journal of Management Development* 30, no. 9 (2011): 865-881.

[316] Ibid., 873.

[317] Ibid., 874.

responsible for everything. Some interviewees even described this top-heavy leadership style as authoritarian. Any empowerment found in the churches is the result of moving far beyond the formal and official documents of the church.

### *How are decisions made?*

#### Interviews

There seems to be a variety of decision-making strategies at the churches. The majority of interviewees gave multiple answers to the decision-making question. The top answer indicated that there is a strong element of team decision-making in their churches. Representatives from all churches gave this answer, including four of the pastors. According to one pastor, "even the pastor does not make solo decisions except in things that he deems are a threat to the body."[318] A member of another church commented on his pastor that "he doesn't take unilateral decisions. The pastor is not dictator."[319]

There seems to be a strong element of top-down decision-making at the church as well, either by the pastor or by the administrative or leadership team. Respondents from all the churches gave this answer. Referring to the pastor, one of the members said that "he decides but goes back to committee with the decision… Our church meets as general assembly but very few times people disagree with decisions."[320] A member of another church described decision-making at his church: "lot of empowerment, but there's authority. If [the pastor] senses something is going wrong, he gets involved and everyone is held accountable."[321] One pastor explained decision-making at his church: "Even the pastor does not make solo decisions except in things

[318] Interviewee2, interview.
[319] Interviewee12, interview.
[320] Interviewee16, interview.
[321] Interviewee20, interview.

that he deems are a threat to the body."[322] Another member of another church declared that "all decisions are being made by the leadership team with the pastor."[323]

There is also a strong element of empowerment in all the churches. One pastor said: "I give them the authority to make small decisions. I don't interfere with every single decision."[324] This statement is representative of what the majority of the respondents thought. There is a lot of empowerment at the ministry level, as long as decisions are deemed not to be a threat to the church. Key decisions are made by the key leaders, medium importance decisions are made by leadership teams, and specific ministry decisions are made by ministry leaders. The vast majority of the respondents who specified empowerment are less than forty years old. A few respondents indicated that key decisions have to go to their general assembly.

This is how one respondent summarized this variety of decision-making strategies: "At [our church] we have a mix of autocratic as well as board-structured decisions."[325] Another respondent expressed it this way: "[Our pastor] still has a culture of do-it-your-own-way as long as it doesn't harm the church or the ministry of the church."[326] Some respondents thought that their pastors were more consultative. They took decisions after proper consultation.

### Church Documents

It is clear in all five churches that "the church" or the general assembly has the final word. It is not always clear, however, what decisions go back to *the church*. Every appointment that requires voting naturally goes back to the church. Within the work of administrative committees or other committees, a few structures stipulate

[322] Interviewee2, interview.
[323] Interviewee1, interview.
[324] Interviewee8, interview.
[325] Interviewee11, interview.
[326] Ibid.

voting. The documents are silent otherwise. A consultation with second-level leaders or with the church is stipulated for some decisions made by the pastors. Basically, the documents do not prescribe in detail how decisions are to be made.

### Observations

What is visible during the formal services is that the big picture decisions are already made while middle-level leaders are empowered to make decisions within that big picture. For example, worship leaders lead with their own styles. They are free to choose whatever songs they wish the congregation to sing. They may be even free to choose their musicians, instruments, and singing team. However, they are not free to make changes to the worship format or timing, for example.

### Analysis

It is obvious from the interviews that several modes of decision-making strategies are employed at the churches at different times. A high number of interviewees thought that decisions are made at the top. A high number also indicated that there are team-based decisions at the churches. Empowerment in making decisions and decisions with consultation also scored high. This confirms that multiple styles of decision-making are present at the same time.

The research quoted in the previous question, Lebanese executives working in Lebanon versus Lebanese executives working in the Gulf states or in the United States, demonstrates the importance of the host culture. 81% of the researched Lebanese subjects working in Lebanon expressed that they thought that the most effective decision-making style is the consultation style.[327] This is the style where leaders consult their subordinates but may or may not consider their opinions while making decisions. This percentage drops to 54% among Lebanese working in the Gulf

[327] Farid, "Contextual Leadership", 871.

in favor of more empowering decision-making styles and drops to 40% among Lebanese working in the United States. The research subjects produced similar results when asked under which decision-making style they prefer to work. However, when the research subjects were asked to describe their own manager's decision-making style, 32% of Lebanese working in Lebanon thought that their managers were authoritarian and 48% consultative. The rest are more empowering. The percentages significantly drop among Lebanese working outside Lebanon in favor of more empowering styles.

This study affirms that context is important. The culture that leaders are born in has primary effect on one's leadership style, but is also highly affected by the host culture of their place of work. None of the five pastors of the researched churches has worked outside Lebanon. The expectation is that they would all adopt a more consultative decision-making style than anything else. All the elements of empowerment that we find in the responses have to be based on the pastors' values and convictions.

Again, it seems that the leaders are trying to navigate the thin line between empowerment as a conviction and being strong authority figures who are accepted in their context.

### *Critical Reflections*

Leadership in the Lebanese Baptist churches is highly aligned with leadership in the community. Top leaders hold the power. It becomes the leaders' prerogative in how much decentralization or empowerment they allow and exercise. They are ultimately responsible and accountable, and they are expected to have the final say. There is an expectation in the Lebanese society that top leaders have power, religious leaders even more so. Churches are known by the names of their pastors. In Lebanon,

the pastor is the one who represents the church towards society and government.[328] Ordination is an important aspect of that. If a church leader is not officially ordained then the legitimacy of the church is questioned, even internally by the Lebanese Baptist Convention.[329] The legitimacy of the church itself is inherited from the legitimacy of the senior pastor.

At the same time, leaders tend to serve for a long time. Consequently, churches are not only identified by their pastors but are also mostly shaped by them. The character, ethos, focus, and ministry of the churches follow the patterns developed and modeled by the pastor. Therefore, the pastor is vital in instigating change, or at least in allowing change. He is the holder of the vision, thus the holder of the keys for change.

**Proclamation and Discipleship**

*What does proclaiming the Gospel mean? What is the Gospel?*

Interviews

With the exception of one of the pastors, all the respondents believed that the Gospel is about individuals being saved. A typical answer of what the Gospel is: "that the Lord died on our behalf and was resurrected to save us and justify us and if we repent of our sins and believe in him we will have eternal life with him."[330]

Some of the respondents believed that there is a social dimension, which is an integral part of the Gospel: "proclaim the Gospel in words and deed."[331] Another said: "We have to show people the message of salvation through caring for them. All these

[328] The formal representation is clear in the Constitution of the Evangelical Baptist Convention in Lebanon. دستور مجمع الكنائس الإنجيلية المعمدانية في لبنان.

[329] Article 2 of the Constitution of the Evangelical Baptist Convention in Lebanon stipulates that the first condition for a church to apply for membership in the convention is that the church has an elected pastor. Ibid., 13.

[330] Interviewee6, interview.

[331] Interviewee11, interview.

ways show people in different ways the Gospel, in physical things more than words."[332] A few respondents believed that there is a social dimension to the Gospel, but is second to evangelism. Two of the respondents are pastors. One of them explained it this way: "Means to an end. I would feed the poor, but my ultimate purpose is to proclaim the Gospel because Jesus came to give life and fullness of life."[333]

### Church Documents

There is no discussion about the Gospel in the documents. The word Gospel is mentioned once in the context of the definition of the church that "spreads the living word of the Gospel." It is mentioned twice in the documents of two other churches as a synonym to the Bible. There is no explanation of what it means to proclaim the Gospel in any of the documents. However, there are many references to evangelism and a few references to serving people and society.

### Observations

The way the Gospel is explained on Sundays is that it is about the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus from the dead to provide us with the means for salvation from our sins. Rarely is there any expression of any social aspect of the Gospel in the formal services.

### Analysis

The term *Gospel* is frequently used as a synonym to *the Bible* or as a term to describe spiritual salvation of individuals. There is no obvious clarity about a holistic understanding of the Gospel. Only about one third of the interviewees believed that

[332] Interviewee5, interview.
[333] Interviewee17, interview.

there is a social dimension to the Gospel, half of them think that it comes second to evangelism, means to an end.

This was the typical understanding of Gospel in the churches in Lebanon, as they were in all Middle Eastern countries where churches exist and function in a majority Muslim world. Meral described this phenomenon:

> For Evangelicals the dominant form and aim of engagement has always been evangelism, thus most of their literature and activities has been aimed towards recruiting others into the church, into its small and narrow existence, a call to jump on a small life-boat that is heading away from this mess into the promised land of salvation by faith in the next life.[334]

### *How is it proclaimed?*

#### Interviews

The majority of respondents, including four of the pastors, thought that proclaiming the Gospel is accomplished through pure evangelization. The Gospel is proclaimed, according to one respondent, through "events, intentional invitations to people to a certain evangelistic event or even meetings, youth meeting people are intentionally invited, we do things to attract people."[335] One of the pastors described their Sunday preaching cycle: "Almost every fourth Sunday is evangelistic message. Non-believers are always in attendance, every Sunday."[336]

Many respondents, the majority of whom are under the age of forty, included a social dimension to the proclamation of the Gospel: "Social help dimension is included,"[337] stated one pastor, "We are living in a society. We are part of a society." Two of the five pastors included the social dimension in their answers.

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[334] Meral, "Change and the Church," 4.
[335] Interviewee7, interview.
[336] Interviewee14, interview.
[337] Interviewee3, interview.

Some respondents thought that proclaiming the Gospel is accomplished through modeling the Christian life to others. "Living the Christian life,"[338] answered one respondent, "by living like Jesus,"[339] declared another, "through living out the effects of the Gospel,"[340] was another response.

Some respondents thought that proclaiming the Gospel is accomplished by teaching and preaching. The Gospel is proclaimed "directly by preaching the word of God."[341]

A few respondents described that proclaiming the Gospel is accomplished by "discipling others".[342]

### Church Documents

As mentioned earlier[343], according to the official documents, there are no structures or activities that support the service of man and society. On the other hand, there are committees whose responsibility is to oversee evangelism, whether taking place inside the church building or through evangelistic visitations. The official documents do not elaborate on any other area of proclaiming the Gospel.

### Observations

The Gospel is proclaimed in the formal setting of the church mainly through teaching and preaching. Some churches focus a lot on hospitality and fellowship, possibly as means of expressing the Gospel.

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[338] Interviewee16, interview.
[339] Interviewee20, interview.
[340] Interviewee9, interview.
[341] Interviewee3, interview.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Refer to earlier discussion in the Analysis section of how the churches fulfill their mission on page 76.

### Analysis

Proclaiming the Gospel is still considered as an internal activity of the church. A high number of respondents thought that this is accomplished through teaching and preaching. Many believe that there are social means of proclaiming the Gospel. Most likely, the means are internal. Proclaiming the Gospel in terms of transforming society is still absent from the consciousness of the churches.

## *How are disciples made?*

### Interviews

The responses to the question of discipleship were varied and scattered. The top answer was that disciples are made through preaching and teaching. "Discipleship in the church should be through the teachings given by the church, including Sunday,"[344] expressed one respondent.

Some respondents indicated that disciples are best made in small group meetings. Two of the pastors indicated this response. One of them expressed that they are "developing a curriculum through small groups"[345] for discipleship. Explaining the importance of small groups, one respondent asserted that small groups "have discussion of topics that we don't normally discuss in church."[346]

Other answers included Bible study and Sunday school, discipleship classes, and Sunday morning services. Two of the pastors indicated this response. Others indicated that the best method for making disciples is by modeling the Christian life, by the mere fact that people spend time with each other. A few respondents indicated mentoring as the best method. "One-on-one is best."[347] Some answers included some

[344] Interviewee15, interview.
[345] Interviewee17, interview.
[346] Interviewee1, interview.
[347] Interviewee2, interview.

sort of apprenticeship relationships, although neither structured nor formal. A few thought that disciples are made through attending training conferences and events. Other respondents indicated that disciples are mostly self-made. They grow naturally as they get involved in ministry.

### Church Documents

The topic of discipleship is strikingly absent from the church documents. One church mentions discipleship as an objective in the definition and the mission statement of the church, but there is no mention of how this is to be accomplished. This same church, in describing the responsibilities of its members, indicates that these responsibilities are not exclusive for the church but also cover the discipleship ministries that stem from the church. There is no further mention of these discipleship ministries elsewhere in the document. Another church mentions follow up and discipleship programs as the responsibility of the evangelism team.

### Observations

Teaching and preaching are the most obvious methods utilized for discipleship in the formal setting of the churches.

### Analysis

Although all five churches believe that they have a role to play in the great commission, and although the great commission focuses on discipleship, this area is still highly lacking any formal attention in the churches. The reaction of one of the pastors was striking. He affirmed the importance of discipleship in the ministry of the church, and when asked what his church is doing about it, he said "nothing." "This is a big gap in our church."[348] Then the discussion swiftly moved on to another topic. No

[348] Interviewee14, interview.

reflection was made on how to rectify this gap. I saw a sense of resignation that this is the way things are and they are not going to change anytime soon.

A lot of effort is spent by the churches on teaching and preaching. Those who attend the formal meetings of the churches will likely benefit from that. Some effort is also spent on evangelism, although mostly internally or through visitations. Those that are on the periphery of the churches will likely benefit from that. Nevertheless, what is still lacking are structures that support intentional life-on-life type of discipleship where more mature believers invest their lives in newer believers or even unbelievers. This gap was starting to be recognized in the churches at the time of the research.

### *Critical Reflections*

It is apparent from the research that the understanding of Gospel at the churches at the time of the field research was very simple and one-dimensional. The definition of Gospel is understood to be the verbal proclamation of the message that should result in the outcome of salvation. Churches in Lebanon had rejected the 'social gospel'[349] and its implications. Even secular writers were able to observe the church as absent from social action in the Middle East.[350] Teaching and preaching in the churches rarely included social action as one of the concerns of the church, and when it did it had a utilitarian function of leading sinners to salvation.

There is another significant finding. The Great Commission is central to the teachings of the churches and to their perceived primary function. However, the great commission is interpreted as evangelism but not as discipleship. Evangelism is primary to the life of the churches, mostly the invitational dimension of evangelism.

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[349] Thinking that any involvement in social action is a deviation from the call to proclaim the gospel.

[350] Asef Bayat, "Activism and Social Development in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 01 (2002): 3.

No missional incarnational activities can be detected beyond evangelistic visitations. Nevertheless, discipleship is mostly lacking. Lebanese Baptist churches still functioned as bounded sets rather than centered sets.[351] In a bounded set mentality, discipleship is concerned with moving people from outside the boundaries to the inside. This is why discipleship is mostly reduced to evangelism. Once a person becomes a member of a bounded set community then targeted discipleship ends and is replaced by general public teaching and preaching.

**Role of the Holy Spirit**

### *How does the Holy Spirit work in and through the Church?*

#### Interviews

The responses to how the interviewees thought the Holy Spirit works in and through the Church were very diverse with no concentration in a particular category.

A few respondents believe that the Holy Spirit works mainly through the prayer life of the church. These respondents made a strong connection between prayer and the Holy Spirit, "we pray and He guides us."[352] Some respondents thought that the Holy Spirit works by drawing people to God and by growing them. "We speak to people, but the Spirit works in them,"[353] said one respondent. "All good works and all God's work is going to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit,"[354] said another. A few respondents believe that the Holy Spirit works through gifting the believers in the church: "He appoints people and equips with gifts or sanctifies their natural gifts."[355] A few respondents gave several other answers such as, the Holy Spirit works through convicting people, the Holy Spirit works through Scripture, through the ministry of

[351] Bounded sets and centered sets are explained later on page 273.
[352] Interviewee7, interview.
[353] Interviewee6, interview.
[354] Interviewee19, interview.
[355] Interviewee8, interview.

the word of God, and the Holy Spirit works through the pastor, by appointing him and gifting him.

### Church Documents

In the documents of four of the churches, The Holy Spirit is almost exclusively mentioned in their statements of faith. The only exception is one reference made to the Holy Spirit when mentioning the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The context is the description of the ministry of the church as having two pillars, the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All other mentions of the gifts in the documents are kept vague, not explicitly referring to spiritual gifts.

The fifth church has multiple mentions of the Holy Spirit beyond its faith statement. The Holy Spirit is mentioned twice in the context of the gifts of the Spirit, once in describing the pastors as they lead according to their gifts, and another in describing the members as they serve according to their gifts. The Holy Spirit is also mentioned in the qualifications for membership of the church, the candidate has to be born again of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned also in the paragraph describing the pastors of the church: “The Holy Spirit is the one who appoints ministers and equips them with visible gifts and abilities.”

### Observations

It is difficult to draw conclusions on what the church thinks about the Holy Spirit from its practices. The churches do not explicitly focus on the Holy Spirit in their formal settings. The presence and the work of the Holy Spirit are implicit rather that explicit in the lives of the churches that were observed.

### Analysis

The Holy Spirit seems to be the person working behind the scenes. He is not officially recognized as an active player in the life of the churches. When respondents

identified cause and effect in church life, the Holy Spirit was absent. The Holy Spirit is there somewhere but not sure how to account for His actions. However, a lot of what happens at the churches was attributed back to the Holy Spirit when people were prompted to think about it. It seems difficult for people to put the work of the Holy Spirit in a clear pragmatic category.

### *In particular, how does He lead?*

#### Interviews

The top response to this question was that the Holy Spirit leads potentially through anyone in the church, not just the pastor: "everyone, from the pastor down",[356] answered one respondent. The Holy Spirit uses everyone, "it's all about how much we're really surrendered to the work of the spirit in our lives."[357] Four of the pastors gave a similar answer.

Many respondents thought that the Spirit leads by bringing about harmony and unity in the church, by causing consensus in decision-making. "Three people come up with the same specific idea… we have to say it's from God for sure",[358] described one respondent. "The Holy Spirit leads the church as a body when we become united together",[359] expressed another. Four of the pastors gave a similar response.

#### Church Documents

The only explicit link between leadership at the church and the Holy Spirit is the one church that affirms that the Holy Spirit is the one who appoints leaders and equips them with gifts and abilities, although it is not clear how that happens. Three other implicit links are related to the gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit.

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[356] Interviewee2, interview.
[357] Interviewee1, interview.
[358] Interviewee9, interview.
[359] Interviewee3, interview.

### Observations

There was no explicit reference to the Holy Spirit in the observations, of any detectable action attributed to Him.

### Analysis

Whenever there is harmony and unity in the churches, half of the interviewees attribute that to the work of the Holy Spirit. A large number of interviewees believe that the Holy Spirit does work and lead through potentially anyone in the church and not just the pastor. This is significant in terms of cognitive understanding. It is not obvious, however, how much that translates into recognizing the Holy Spirit through people's ideas and opinions. There does not seem to be frameworks for discernment where the Holy Spirit is consciously given consideration in what happens in the churches.

It is worth noting that the discussion on how the Holy Spirit leads did not prompt any mention of spiritual gifts and how these gifts can be used by the Spirit to lead in the church. The connection between the Holy Spirit and leadership or decision-making did not come naturally to the interviewees. It seems that people in the churches have some theoretical understanding of how the Holy Spirit functions, but how that takes place on the ground on a daily basis remains unexplained.

### *Critical Reflections*

My own life experience as part of the Baptist church in Lebanon affirms the findings. There might be some cognitive dissonance in the churches about the role of the Holy Spirit. Church members are quick to affirm that the Holy Spirit is behind all the workings of the Church while find it difficult to attribute any specific action or decision to the Holy Spirit. When people pray for a specific problem in the church, and that problem is later resolved, people tend to rationalize the solution. They are

able to analyze the factors that led to the problem being solved. The Holy Spirit is seen as somewhere in the background overseeing and guiding, but He is not seen at the center as an active participant.

There seems to be absence of teaching on spiritual gifts in the churches. This may be due to the inward posture that the churches have, the *resignation* posture.[360] There may be no interest in discovering shepherding gifts among the members when there is room for only one shepherd in the church, or discovering teaching gifts when there is one pulpit in the church. As ministry is viewed mostly as an internal activity, spiritual gifts are thought to be exercised exclusively internally. The outcome of this is that spiritual gifts are not prominent in the thinking of the church. As John F. Walvoord argues, "[o]ne of the important ministries of the Holy Spirit to believers today is His bestowal of spiritual gifts on Christians at the time of their conversion."[361] Consequently, without the church being sensitized to the role the Holy Spirit plays through His gifting, His role remains a misunderstood reality.

**Ethics**

### *What characterizes a believer? Why?*

#### Interviews

The top response to what the interviewees thought characterizes a believer is mainly their behavior: their life of integrity, their relationship with others, etc. One respondent summarized it by saying: "They know you by your love. This is the main trigger. Then come the elements of faithfulness, kindness, ethical standards, basically living by the ethos they proclaim."[362]

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[360] Refer to discussion on Ziya Meral in the previous chapter on page 86.

[361] John F. Walvoord, "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts," *Bibliotheca sacra* 143, no. 570 (1986): 109.

[362] Interviewee11, interview.

Some respondents indicated that what characterizes a believer is living out Kingdom values, attitudes, thinking, and principles. One pastor commented: "in our church we go back to the values, adhering to the values."[363]

A few respondents indicated that living a Christ-like life, living out the image of God, is what should characterize a believer. "The believer should be someone that reflects Jesus Christ in his life every day,"[364] commented one respondent.

Another response was that what should characterize a believer is a life of obedience to God and His word, "someone who is willing to obey Christ no matter what."[365]

Many of the respondents indicated exclusively behavior as a measure of what characterizes a believer. One of them is a pastor.

### Church Documents

The documents do not specify what characterizes a believer. They do specify, however, conditions or qualifications for membership. They include being a true believer in Christ, being born again of the Holy Spirit, baptized through immersion, and has the desire to commit to a local church with its principles, practices, policies, and covenant.

### Observations

The teaching and preaching at the church meetings exhort the believers to be Christ-like, live a holy Christian charitable life and stay away from sin. Believers are exhorted to be truthful and respectful in their dealings in the world.

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[363] Interviewee17, interview.
[364] Interviewee1, interview.
[365] Interviewee20, interview.

### Analysis

Good Christian behavior is clearly the most important characteristic of a believer. There is a high level of expectation for some kind of conformity to the behavioral norms of the churches. This includes appearance as well.

Well worth noting, also, is the high number of respondents who are looking for Christ-likeness, living out Kingdom values, and obedience as healthy characteristics of believers.

## *What particular behaviors and attitudes, if any, should characterize a believer?*

### Interviews

Many respondents indicated that a believer should be characterized by love and compassion towards others. One respondent summarized it well:[366]

> To me, love is the most important thing that distinguishes a believer from a non-believer in his life. The love that's unconditional and does not serve his purposes but on the contrary looks more towards the other person.

A few respondents added a life of prayer to the list of behaviors or attitudes that should characterize a believer. This was not a primary response to any of the interviewees but an added response. “Maybe we need to add prayers,”[367] commented one of the pastors.

The rest of the answers vary widely among various Christian characteristics, such as humility, good works, high morals, servanthood, truth telling, etc.

### Church Documents

The documents address members rather than believers. According to the bylaws of the churches, the following is expected from each member: commitment to attending church services, serving according to gifts, working in harmony with others,

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[366] Interviewee1, interview.
[367] Interviewee17, interview.

giving generously, and walking in a manner that honors Christ and according to the teachings of the New Testament. According to one church's new membership pledge, the member has to be a good model to others in commitment and behavior. Another church's membership pledge expects a high level of conduct, behavior, and appearance.

### Observations

Appearance is very important to the churches. Usually leaders engaged in pulpit ministry are dressed formally, such as suit and tie, especially on Sundays. Everyone else is expected to dress modestly and tastefully. They tend to dress up on Sundays more than meetings throughout the week. In some of the churches, head cover is expected for women.

### Analysis

It is interesting that characteristics such as love, compassion, and a life of prayer, are the ones that interviewees thought of when answering this question. These qualities are affirmed by the expectations described in the official church documents. But when it comes to reality, when looking at "sins" or behaviors that would require church discipline,[368] not exhibiting enough love or compassion or not having a good prayer life are not mentioned as grounds for discipline. The theoretical expectations of members do not totally correspond to the practical expectations.

There is a lot of conformity in terms of appearance and how people dress to church meetings, even though this is not explicitly stated in the documents or taught from the pulpit. This seems to be more of a tradition or an unwritten code that people intuitively know and follow.

[368] Refer to the discussion on the following interview question.

### *What are the behaviors or attitudes, if any, that a believer should avoid?*

#### Interviews

The answers in this category vary widely. On the top of the list are pride, self-righteousness, conceit and arrogance. Other responses were anger and selfishness. All responses were attitudinal, none purely behavioral.

#### Church Documents

The formal church documents only mention the conditions for which a member can be subject to church discipline. According to the bylaws, they include committing an offense to the New Testament teachings, having attitudes contrary to Christian principles, lacking commitment to the responsibilities of members, behaving in a way that discredits the witness of the member or of the church, behaving in an unethical or unchristian way, and doctrinal deviation. One church's membership pledge prohibits the members from being members in any political party or social organization that conflicts with the teachings of the Bible.

#### Observations

Insufficient data could be produced by the observers in answer to this question.

#### Analysis

Again, as with the previous question, the theoretical expectations differ from the practiced expectations in the life of the churches. Pride, anger, and selfishness are thought to be the main attitudes that should not be present among the believers. However, it is highly unlikely that such attitudes would prompt the church discipline that is described in the documents.

### *What is the relationship between the Church and the surrounding society?*

#### Interviews

Half of those that answered this question directly considered that the church is supposed to be an influence on its surrounding society. One respondent commented: "I feel that [the church] needs to make a difference in the area that it's in. We're starting to do that and it's very challenging."[369] Some respondents said that the church is supposed to be a lighthouse to its surrounding society: "It's the place where you can find truth and the truth proclaimed."[370] The rest of the answers varied widely.

#### Church Documents

Three of the churches specify that one of the purposes of their ministry is "serving man and society". A fourth church, in its mission statement, presents a clear vision for presenting the people in their community the full Gospel in both word and deed. However, none of the churches, in their formal documents, provides the structure needed to carry on this mission.

#### Observations

It is not clear how much the church members can connect what happens inside the church building during its services with what happens outside in the neighboring community. The majority of the members of three of the churches drive a long way to come to the church building. These churches are located in predominantly Muslim areas of Beirut, and their members have moved over time to predominantly Christian suburbs. They no longer live in the community that the church is expected to serve.

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[369] Interviewee7, interview.
[370] Interviewee10, interview.

### Analysis

There is an understanding among half the interviewees that a church should be an influence, a lighthouse, to its surrounding society. However, three of the churches have the majority of their members drive to the meetings from outside the building neighborhood. This is largely due to the demographic changes that took place during the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1990). The members do not live where the church was called to serve. When interviewees of all five churches were asked whether anyone in their church neighborhood would notice should their church close down its building or leave, the majority answered that no one would notice. There is not enough in the DNA of the churches to prompt the members and to drive the activities of the churches in intentionally being mindful of the surrounding communities.

### *Critical Reflections*

We come back to the same challenge. Are the churches being effective in reaching their surrounding communities? Because of the *resignation* response, most of the activities of the churches seem to be directed inwards, and the churches conduct themselves as if the church exists for the sake of itself rather than for the sake of the world. However, the whole concept of effectiveness and impact is elusive and hard to define. Impact can be subtle yet profound without even being intentional about it. The presence of church activity in a society can have an enormous impact, whether planned or not. While churches can be encouraged to get more engaged in missional activities within their communities, we cannot conclude that because churches had become in-grown they are not effective.

## Conclusion to the First Set of Data

So far in this case study, I explained the details of the field research and presented the findings from the interviews, church documents, and observations with

and from five churches of the Lebanese Baptist Convention according to seven aspects of the church. I now present the second data set – that of case studies.

## *The Second Data Set: Case Studies*

The second data set of this autoethnographic study is in the form of three case studies offered chronologically – of my Canadian experience (1990 to 2005), of theological education in Lebanon (2009 to 2014), and of the Lebanese Baptist churches' response to times of crisis (2011 to 2020).

**My Canadian Experience (1990 to 2005)**

My Canadian experience includes my time at the Middle East Baptist Church (1990 to 2005) and my time at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto (2000 to 2003).

The Middle East Baptist Church[371] is a local, Arabic-speaking congregation, located in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, a suburb of the city of Toronto. I spent fifteen years at this church, 1990 to 2005. It was very formative for my thinking and understanding of ministry. In 2005, my wife and I ended up going back to Lebanon as global field staff (missionaries) with Canadian Baptist Ministries[372], with Middle East Baptist Church as our sending church. Hence, we are still very much part of that community as we serve in Lebanon.

In this section, I want to describe the journey that this church took into adopting a missional ecclesiological framework for understanding its nature and ministry, and how that understanding has influenced its praxis. I witnessed this journey while I was a member of the lay leadership team of the church. The observations and analyses provided in this chapter are all mine. I am approaching this case study as an insider and engaged participant observer. Jaco Dreyer argues for the

[371] "Middle East Baptist Church" http://www.mebc.org/web/ (accessed 30 October 2020).
[372] "Canadian Baptist Ministries" http://cbmin.org/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

validity of an involved participant researcher, taking into consideration what he calls the "dialectic of belonging and distanciation."[373] He argues that, instead of the dualistic thinking of involved insider participant versus the disengaged outsider observer, a dialectic hermeneutic is possible by following prescribed hermeneutical principles.[374] In my analysis, I will combine reflexive observation as an immersed insider while trying to critique, at least partially, the prevalent ideology as a disengaged outsider.

### *History of the Church*

The official date that is used to mark the start of the church is November 1990. A group of people had been meeting for many years, hosted by a Canadian Baptist church. This group of people did not have a leader, did not have structures that are normally found in churches, and did not have a clear identity, belonging, or affiliation with any denominational structure in Canada. This has caused some inconsistency in the teachings and direction of the church. In November 1990, the group formed themselves into a church. They called a pastor to come and lead the church, they decided on a Baptist identity for the church, and they sought affiliation with what was then called the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec[375]. A good majority of the group signed up as founding members of the church.

In 1997 the pastor left the church with a group of people. An interim pastor was called to lead the church in 1998, initially for a three-month period. He ended up staying for three years. During that time, in 2000, the church moved into its own building that it was able to purchase. In 2001, after the departure of the interim pastor,

[373] Jaco S. Dreyer, "The Researcher: Engaged Participant or Detached Observer?," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 11, no. 2 (1998): 11.
[374] Ibid., 12-14.
[375] "Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec" http://baptist.ca/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

another pastor was called. He resigned two years later due to lack of harmony about the identity and direction of the church. The pastor was fundamentalist and the church was not. The pastor did not want to impose his direction on the church, and the church was not willing to follow the fundamentalist path. This was a very peaceful separation. The church had matured enough to know what it wanted and needed, and the pastor was peaceful enough to leave without creating conflict. This was the year 2003. This year, in my opinion, marks the start of transformation of the church into becoming more missional.

### *Demographics of the Church*

Immigrant churches tend to be challenging due to the diversity of backgrounds that people come from. The Middle East Baptist Church had members from a variety of countries from the Middle East, the majority from Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. Lebanese and Palestinians are mostly Arabs while Iraqis are mostly Assyrian and Chaldean.

The diversity in background is in not only the countries that they come from but also the denominations they grew up in. Some came from a Baptist background, some from Brethren, some from Presbyterian, others from Christian Missionary Alliance, and others from Pentecostal churches. The differences in backgrounds were obvious not just in doctrinal issues but also in habits, traditions, and forms of worship. Members of Middle East Baptist that have come to faith and lived all their lives in a single church found it difficult to acclimate to new forms of church. It was difficult for them to differentiate between what is Biblical and what is tradition. They were very attached to their forms of church back home.

There was a strong diversity in the cultural, educational, and social levels of church members. Some were new immigrants who did not have jobs or means of

transportation. Others were well established having their careers as a priority in their lives.

One of the biggest challenges at the church was language. New immigrants spoke Arabic with hardly any understanding of the English language. They needed to worship and hear the word of God in Arabic. The Iraqi families among them, however, did not speak Arabic at home. They either spoke Assyrian or Chaldean. This means that even though the parents were fluent in Arabic, their children were not fluent in Arabic and were not yet fluent in English. On the other hand, there were immigrants that had been in Canada for many years. The parents were still fluent in Arabic, and that was their language of choice for the church. Their children, however, were not learning Arabic. They may speak some Arabic at home, but they did not have enough knowledge of the language to read the Bible or worship or listen to sermons in Arabic. This generation's language of choice was English.

### *The Journey of Change*

Just like any other church, the history of Middle East Baptist Church is filled with good moments and challenging moments. The church grew and matured through both. By the time the pastor resigned in 2003 the church was ready to take responsibility for itself and to chart the way forward. In addition, in 2000 one of the key leaders in our church and myself felt called by God to get seminary training alongside our full-time jobs and ministry. We both joined the MTS modular program of Tyndale Seminary[376]. We did not recognize when we joined that this program was "organized around a missional understanding of the Church as the people of God called and sent out into every sphere of society to embody and witness the good news

[376] "Tyndale Seminary: Mts Modular - Home" http://www.tyndale.ca/seminary/mtsmodular (accessed 30 October 2020).

of God's coming kingdom."[377] This program challenged us to think differently about the nature and mission of the church. We graduated in 2003 at the time the pastor resigned. The two of us were able to reflect on our seminary training and bring new inspiring challenges to the church because of that.

So, when the pastor left in 2003 a new leadership team took responsibility for leading the church. There were four men in this team, including the two of us that had just graduated from the missional program at Tyndale Seminary. In the rest of this chapter, I will attempt to break down the principles and behaviors that have guided our thinking and that God used to instigate change in the church.

### Decision-Making

When the four of us in the leadership team found ourselves in this critical leadership role, we started to meet weekly and study the Bible together. Every area where we felt we needed to change we would study it together as a team. There was no voting within this team. When all of us became at peace with what we learned, we took the material and taught it to the congregation on Fridays during Bible Study time. The Bible studies were designed to bring a challenge from Scriptures. We left it at that level, with no particular application in mind. After teaching on the topic adequately we then took the matter to the church's business meeting. That was the platform used to decide on how to implement the change. We only implemented a change when we sensed that there was enough peace about it among the congregation. This is the process that we ended up labeling as *pneumocratic*.[378] This is how we were convinced that the Holy Spirit was leading change in the church.

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[377] Ibid.

[378] This is a term that emerged out of the missional church literature. It is used to mean "the rule of the Holy Spirit". This term is discussed in more detail in chapters four and five.

### Plurality of Leadership

This is probably the most important change that we went through at the church. The Middle East Baptist Church was very similar in its leadership and structure to other churches in the Arab world. It always had a solo pastor who was exclusively responsible for leading the church, guiding it, shepherding the people, and making all the top-level decisions. When the four of us took on the shared leadership position after the pastor resigned, none of us had the ambition or perceived calling to become the senior leader or leader among leaders. All of us saw ourselves as strong leadership support, as "number two" in the church, not as "number one". It was as if this was exactly what God wanted in the church, Christ as the "number one" and all the other leaders as "number two".

This new arrangement made a lot of sense to us at that time. We were convinced that it was not right for a solo person to have the sole responsibility of leading the church. There was no one person who had all the gifts of the Spirit needed to do that. However, we were not sure how the plurality might work out in a culture like ours. Initially, this change left the members a bit confused. They were used to having one go-to person, the pastor, when they needed to discuss any church business. Now, with multiple leaders, they were not sure whom to go to. However, very quickly things changed. The four of us in the leadership team had different gifts. We complemented one another. Each one of us naturally led in the area of his giftedness. The congregation understood that and got used to it.

In our Arabic culture, as in many other cultures, churches are known by their pastors. When a church ministry prospered, credit was given to the pastor, and when a church ministry declined, blame was attached to the pastor. An immediate outcome that we saw at the church, after implementing plurality of leadership, is that, as

ministry started to grow and flourish, people were looking for a single person to give credit to. They could not identify that one person. Consequently, God ended up getting the credit.

The Middle East Baptist Church still has that same model of leadership more than ten years later. This is not to argue that the concept of no solo pastor or senior pastor should necessarily be normative. It does present, however, a functional alternative to the popular view.

### Priesthood of All Believers

The concept of the priesthood of all believers is one of the main tenets of the Baptist faith.[379] However, this is not a concept that many Baptist communities practice. The practice of the priesthood of all believers diminished to the "priesthood of the ordained."[380] Opportunities for lay people to do ministry were reduced in time. This was the case at Middle East Baptist Church. Ministry was the sole responsibility of the pastor, assisted by a few mature members selected by him, and loyal to him. At the start of this journey at Middle East Baptist, there were only a few individuals that were considered the pillars of the ministry at the church. As the church was transforming into becoming missional, the understanding of who the "minister" is started changing. The understanding that every member is a minister and a missionary captured people's thinking and changed their attitudes towards ministry. As a direct result of that, more and more "lay" people engaged in ministry. The church building became a busy place of ministry, like a beehive. Anytime we walked into the church building during evenings and weekends, there were always groups of people doing

[379] J. Terry Young, "Baptists and the Priesthood of Believers," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 20, no. 2 (1993): 131.

[380] Marc Nicholas, "The Priesthood of Some Believers: Developments from the General to the Special Priesthood in the Christian Literature of the First Three Centuries," *American Baptist Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2004): 99.

something. The church building that was previously closed the whole week except for the official church meeting times has become an active place of ministry for the whole week. The changed understanding of the priesthood of all believers was closely connected with the understanding of the members' spiritual gifts. This will be discussed next.

### Spiritual Gifts

At Middle East Baptist Church, just like at every church that I had been a member of, spiritual gifts were largely neglected. Since our view of ministry was limited to what happens inside the four walls of the church building, there was no need to explore the gifts of the "laity". For example, there was no room for multiplicity in public gifts. How many teachers does a small congregation need? How many with pastoral gifts? There was no need for our church to discover and build up the gifts of the members. The giftedness of the pastor and his assistants was sufficient. However, as the focus of ministry changed and as the understanding of the location of ministry changed from inside to outside, this opened up new categories for ministry that required new giftedness. In order to decide how to carry on ministry outside the walls of the church, we found ourselves in need of discovering the gifts that we have among the congregation and how to mobilize these gifts. Unexpectedly, we found our leadership role at the church transform into becoming an equipping role. Our thinking of our own role as leaders at the church transformed from being the ones that "do" ministry to becoming the ones that equip and coach others in doing ministry. As a result of that, we started offering the congregation courses on how to discover their own spiritual gifts, passions, and personal styles, and we matched their profiles with

the needed ministry profile for each new opportunity that emerged. The Network Resources[381] were extremely helpful to us during that stage.

### Ministry Focus

Once the church members understood their role as fellow "priests" and were aware of their gifts and profiles and equipped to use them, they were all eager to get involved in ministry. It became one of the primary roles of the leaders of the church to create opportunities for ministry for every member. As the opportunities grew and members got more engaged in ministry, the church environment became a lot more pleasant and positive. Before being engaged in ministry, the members had a lot of free time on their hands. They mainly occupied themselves with negative attitudes and behavior. They frequently grumbled and complained, and they caused friction with each other on petty issues. Business meetings at the church were a chore. Once members found themselves involved in ministry, suddenly their outlook changed. They wanted to work with each other to accomplish bigger tasks, and their focus was on getting the right training and equipping to be able to perform their functions adequately. The focus on ministry helped transform the environment from negative to positive.

### Christian Education

During the early years of the life of Middle East Baptist, under the leadership of the first pastor, the congregation was kept in the dark regarding serious issues. The modus operandi was to instruct the congregation on how they should live their daily lives, but keep the leadership concerns within the bounds of the pastor and his selected helpers. All main decisions were made by the small exclusive group. The

[381] A collection of resources that help congregations plan, train, and evaluate individual and ministry profiles. Their web site is http://www.brucebugbee.com/network-resources/.

congregation was informed of those decisions but only if there was a pressing need to inform them. For example, when the pastor was ordained in the mid 1990s, he was concerned that the congregation would find out that he had been the pastor of the church for a number of years without being ordained. So, he decided that the ordination would be hosted by a different church with the presence and knowledge of only three people from Middle East Baptist, his loyal helpers. I was one of them. When ordination is supposed to be the laying of hands of the congregation on a selected leader, this ordination was done in secret.

As part of the journey of change, our decision as leaders was to change the model into a new one where the congregation was informed of every tiny detail of the life of the church, except where confidentiality was warranted. It was our decision to raise the level of education of the congregation in all matters of congregational life, including matters of doctrine. We started giving education a serious consideration. Adult Sunday School classes were changed to provide deep learning. I taught one of the adult classes for two years going through Wayne Grudem's *Bible Doctrine*. It was a study in systematic theology. The idea was not to indoctrinate the congregation but to instill in them love for the depth of our belief and to teach them discernment in matters of faith and life. Several members of the church ended up going to seminary and getting more adequately prepared for ministry. That was not a consideration for members before this missional journey. Taking education seriously has helped transform the congregation from passive followers to engaged participants.

### Vision Setting

Before the change journey, ministry at Middle East Baptist was in maintenance mode, keeping status quo, and maintaining programs. With the growth of a vision for missional ministry, setting a vision became the standard. Every ministry

team came up with their own objectives and strategy for doing their ministry. These collective strategies became the foundation for the budget. Instead of a budget driven by maintenance, the budget started to follow the vision for ministry and became driven by it. Less and less money was spent on maintenance as the focus shifted to mission and engaged ministry.

During this journey, the leaders of the church learned how to discover mission rather than coming up with our own. This thinking was influenced by Reggie McNeal's *The Present Future*.[382] In his chapter on vision, he makes the argument that vision is discovered rather than created. It is God's vision and not ours. Our role is to discern it, and we do that by observing what God is doing in and around the church. This concept became a reality for the church very quickly.

One example of how this took place, at one point in time during the journey the leaders felt that a new focus should be placed on evangelism. The leaders' assessment was that the church was not doing well in that regard. At that time, one of the members of the church approached the leaders with his desire to be set apart of the evangelism ministry of the church. He was a relatively new member of the church, and new immigrant. He was theologically trained before coming to Canada. His gift and passion are evangelism. Also at the same time, the denominational structure that our church is affiliated with approached us with an offer to fund new evangelistic initiatives. With our modified way of thinking, it was not too difficult to put all these things together to discern, with confidence, what God wanted us to do. This was presented to the members who immediately agreed, and that individual was commissioned to lead the evangelistic ministries of the church.

[382] Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

Another example, the customary place of ministry for women in our church at that time was to teach in Sunday school. When we started to teach them about spiritual gifts and passions and we assessed their profiles, we quickly discovered that some of these women did not have a passion for working with children, and some did not have the gift of teaching. We discovered that the majority of these women had a passion for working with the poor and the marginalized. That was the start of new compassionate ministries at the church. The church learned how to discover whom God has brought to the church, what gifts and passions they had, and what needs are present in the community around the church. That discovery was an important learning for the church during that transformation journey.

### From Organization to Organism

Middle East Baptist Church was organized like an organization. It had rigid leadership and decision-making structures, committees that are elected annually, and programs that needed to be protected. Committee members were selected in a way to ensure good representation from the church. There was a lot of rotation of people moving into committee membership every year, with little regard to giftedness or availability. Quite often the work of committees floundered because of that. As the church understood that it is a living mechanism who is constantly changing and always responsive to the Head (God), the structure inevitably changed. Teams were formed to replace committees. Team members did not have to wait a year to come on board or to leave the team, and they were selected based on their giftedness, passion, and availability, and were encouraged to join different teams otherwise. Matching between ministry profiles and member profiles was very helpful in that process. In addition, the ministry of the church was driven by its vision for ministry and mission

rather than by the need to protect programs. The understanding of the concept of the church as a living organism proved to be so liberating for the church.

### From Church-Centered to Kingdom-Centered

During the early years of Middle East Baptist Church, the leaders and members were very protective on the church, its identity, and its function. The church was not in good standing with other churches and other ministries. During the years when the church rented space for its church meetings from an English-speaking Canadian church, the relationship between the two churches was very tense. There was a lot protectiveness and competitiveness. The relationship was based on legal and financial foundations and not on ministry foundations. Also, the relationship with other Arabic-speaking churches in the Toronto area was stressed. The focus of the church was to protect "the sheep" rather than look for ways to work together to accomplish a bigger vision. Even the relationship between the church and its denominational body was nonexistent. The focus of the church was internal.

I do not remember the transformation into becoming Kingdom-focused as an intentional change. The church did not set out to become Kingdom-centered. It seems that this thinking emerged as a byproduct of the transformation that took place in all the other areas. By acquiring a ministry focus, suddenly the church found itself behaving with a different mentality. Relationships with other like-minded churches, ministries, and denominational bodies became the norm. The church found itself looking inside as well as outside for ministry collaborators who shared its vision. Suddenly, the Kingdom became all that mattered.

### Metrics

When Middle East Baptist Church was in protective and maintenance mode, it evaluated its health by the standard metrics that churches were accustomed to,

numbers-driven metrics. The number of members, number of attendees in each church service, and the number of new adherents and baptisms was all that mattered. Members were taught that the ultimate measure of good membership is to never miss a church service.

With the transformation that took place at the church, what became more important than attending church services is what the members did and how they conducted their lives and what ministry they participated in while they were outside the church building. What the members did in the world started to matter. Priority was given to ministry rather than church service attendance. Making a difference in the world became important. The old view was that members came to the church building to do ministry. The understanding changed to the view that members came to the church building for corporate worship, for fellowship, for edification, and for equipping, and they go back out into the world for ministry.

Numbers still mattered, but it was no longer the number of people attending a certain church service. It became the number of people that the church was able to release for ministry. The metrics changed from how many people the church can draw inside to how many of them the church can send outside.

### Sending Missionaries

The majority of the members of Middle East Baptist Church came from communities that were the byproduct of foreign mission work in their respective countries. The prevalent understanding of "mission" was that Western foreigners did the work of missions and our church communities were the recipients. The transformation that the church experienced started to shake that understanding. Members were starting to understand their role as missionaries to their own home, workplace, neighborhood, and every sphere of their lives. They were getting

accustomed to their role wherever they are. However, the church had not been faced with the need to send missionaries away from the church into a far-away setting.

The big test came when my wife, Mireille, and I were called to return to Lebanon in 2004 to be engaged in ministry there. Both of us were very active in the ministry and life of the church. We were regularly mentoring and coaching younger believers in our church community. It was obvious that we would leave a large gap if we decided to move away. The big question for the church was whether they were willing to let go of us to follow God's calling on our lives. We included the leaders of the church, and other trusted friends, in our discernment process. Although emotionally the leaders of the church were against our leaving, they wholeheartedly endorsed and blessed our move. They remain committed to supporting our mission in Lebanon to this day. However, the majority of the congregation acted in a different way. Many felt that they were betrayed, that we were abandoning our ministry with them in favor of another one overseas. They were shocked by our decision.

With time, the congregation started to understand that it had the privilege of welcoming new people, training them and equipping them for ministry, and then possibly sending them back to be used by God elsewhere. A transformation of understanding was taking place from hoarding emerging leaders to releasing them and supporting them. This was quite the change for the congregation. God used the sending of Mireille and me to loosen the soil for the church. Others were sent since then, and more are open to be sent. God is proving to the church that He provides the right people at the right time to fill the gaps that people leave behind.

**Theological Education in Lebanon (2009 to 2014)**

This case study covers the curriculum redesign of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and the resulting impact on the students' understanding of the seven aspects of the Church.

I serve as the President of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS)[383]. I started at ABTS as Provost in July 2005, and became President in August 2008. We had become disillusioned at ABTS with theological education as the solution for the problems of the Church in the Arab world. We became convinced that traditional theological curricula are not adequate for preparing leaders for missional ministry, especially in a context like ours.[384] Many factors came together that encouraged us and enabled us to redesign our curriculum from the ground up. ABTS's educationalist, Perry Shaw, who was the main architect that led the process, has documented the story of our curriculum revision in his recently published book *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning*[385]. He told the story while presenting principles and tools for transforming theological education.

ABTS had gone through several minor curriculum revisions during its history, but nothing drastic as the latest change that was first implemented in the academic year 2009-2010. This recent journey of change started in 2004 with a few workshops on multi-dimensional learning. The journey of that initial phase ended in 2009 with a new curriculum designed from scratch, from the ground up. It is a three-year curriculum. The first year that students studied under the new curriculum was 2009-

[383] http://www.abtslebanon.org.

[384] ABTS serves the Church in the entire Arab world. Its students come from all over the Arabic-speaking North Africa and Middle East.

[385] Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Langham Global Library, 2014).

2010. The first cohort that graduated from the three-year program of the new curriculum was in June 2012, at the end of the academic year 2011-2012.[386]

The impact of theological education will be analyzed using three different sources. The first source is specific to one course that was offered at ABTS starting in the academic year 2013-2014, a course on Missional Ecclesiology. The second source is looking at the students' self-assessment, with a special focus on the area of missional engagement. The third source is the assessment project that was conducted at ABTS among its graduates and their respective church communities, also with a special focus on missional engagement.

### *Missional Ecclesiology Course*

An essential part of the curricular revision was to present material in context-driven integrated modules. We wanted to equip missional leaders to initiate and lead missional ministries. We wanted to see at the end of our training leaders who are transformed and transformative. This led us to include a Missional Church module as one of the core modules of the program. This module is composed of the following component courses that were designed to integrate and complement one another: The Mission of God and the Bible, The History of the Church and the Mission of God, Missional Ecclesiology, Leading Change, in addition to an Integrative Project. Because of my high interest, practical experience, and academic work in Missional Ecclesiology, I was asked to teach two of the courses within this module: the Missional Ecclesiology course and the Leading Change course.

The Missional Ecclesiology course was taught in the academic year 2013-2014 for the first time. Students were exposed to a missional framework for thinking about the church and were presented with several models for accomplishing that task.

[386] Ibid., 1-3.

Their assignments included studying chapters on Ecclesiology in three different Systematic Theology works.[387] They were required to read these chapters through a missional lens and provide a critique of these chapters. Then they were required to write their own Missional Ecclesiology chapter that would fit as a chapter within a Systematic Theology work.

Twenty-three students enrolled in this course in the academic year 2013-2014. Ten of them did an outstanding job in writing their own Missional Ecclesiology that earned them a grade of A.[388] A grade of A is given to students who demonstrate an excellent level of work, reflecting a "broad and deep understanding of the subject," and demonstrate "clear evidence of the ability to analyze a variety of perspectives reasonably and logically."[389] The A students are expected to show "good awareness of practical implications with a solid degree of personal, social and theological reflection", as well as "excellent progress in attaining the course learning outcomes."[390] These ten students presented creative ideas in their Missional Ecclesiology papers[391] that are worth studying. In order to offer an easy way to summarize their learning, I have consolidated their learning into the same seven categories of my interview questions presented earlier in this chapter as the first data set. The students did not have access to my questions or categories, so they did not set out to answer them intentionally. Their papers were guided by what they thought was important to communicate about their missional understanding of church.

[387] Students taking this course at a Master's level were required to engage with five different systematic theology books rather than three.

[388] Five of the students did their assignment at undergraduate level, and the other five at graduate level. Nine of the papers were written in Arabic, one in English.

[389] *ABTS Grades and Grading Standards* (Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013).

[390] Ibid.

[391] Permission was granted by these students to use their papers in this research.

It is worthwhile to mention that the students, in their critiques of the existing Ecclesiology chapters, consistently identified the major gaps in discussing mission and missional life in all the systematic theology works that they reviewed. Consequently, they all attempted to compensate for this gap as they wrote their own Missional Ecclesiology chapters.

What I found remarkable and creative is that four of the students based their understanding of church and mission on their understanding of the Trinity. Also striking is that three of the students strongly connected the role of the church with the role of the Kingdom of God.

### Mission

Five of the ten students paid special attention to the category of mission in their Missional Ecclesiology chapters. One of them based his whole chapter on the concept of *missio Dei*, starting from the foundation of God as a missionary God.

The students described mission as fulfilling God's purposes in the world, engaging the world with Kingdom values, concepts, behaviors, and discernment. Mission includes outreach and proclamation, acts of compassion, and having a prophetic voice in the world. Mission sometimes includes performing miracles that witness to the work of God. Mission gets involved in the social, political, economic, and spiritual spheres of society. Mission is living a life of holiness, witnessing about God's redemptive work.

All the students that addressed the area of mission agree that mission is the work of every believer and not limited to a small group of people, not just the work of the commissioned professional missionaries. All the believers are set apart for ministry, whether inside the church or at work. This is the missional side of ministry. Also, Mission is not just West to East. Every place in the world is a mission field.

### Church

As expected, this was the main category that was addressed by all the students. Some students followed a traditional format for communicating their understanding of Church, including a discussion on ordinances. The majority, however, were able to weave their understanding of Church with their understanding of mission, the nature of the Trinity, and the role of the Kingdom of God. Their collective answers can be summarized in the following four concepts:

Firstly, Church is the body of Christ. Church is the community of believers called to fulfill Christ's mission. The Church by nature is a missional being. The Church can be viewed as the continuation of the story of God with His people. The Church is a spiritual body that gathers all the believers. The Church is a movement and not an organization. It is a living organism.

Secondly, Church is synonymous with mission. The role of the church in society can be summed up as fulfilling the mission of God. The Church should be missional and centrifugal. Mission is not something that the Church can run away from or stop doing. The Church participates in God's mission in the world, not by obligation, but by virtue of its nature. The Church is the extension of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the Church has the ultimate purpose of glorifying God. Under that meta-mandate, the Church has internal purposes and external purposes. The internal purposes include worship, obedience, edification and the spiritual life of the believers, service, and fellowship. The external purposes include proclamation in word and deed and as a lifestyle, service to others, creation care, and social concern. One of the main purposes of the church is to train and equip leaders in missional thinking. The main purposes of the church, however, are external and not internal.

Fourthly, the role of the church is directly connected with the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the foundation of the church through which the Kingdom works in the world. The church is an expression of the Kingdom, through word and deed. The church is the agent of the Kingdom in the world, witnessing of the Kingdom to the world.

As mentioned above, some students based their understanding of the Church on the Trinity. The direct implication of that, they argued, is the expected unity of the Church. All four students who identified the Trinity as basis for the Church found it very essential to find unity within the Church and among believers.

The students had a lot to say regarding leadership and giftedness. This will be dealt with later. Not much else was mentioned in terms of church structure, except for one student who identified the congregational model of governance as the preferred model. Several students highlighted the importance of the ministry of women in the church.

### Growth and Reproduction

This category was not directly addressed in the student papers. One student hinted about this topic by referring to the biological connotation of the term "member", thus the health and growth of the body is contingent on the health and growth of each member. Another student also stressed on the importance of active membership as a prerequisite for growth. This is the extent of coverage pertaining to the category of growth and reproduction in the students' papers.

### Leadership

Seven of the ten students mentioned the area of leadership in their Ecclesiology chapters. Six of them referred to Ephesians 4 as a model for an equipping ministry where the leaders have the leadership gifts of apostleship,

prophecy, evangelism, pastoring, and teaching. They affirmed that the goal of leadership is to equip and to raise awareness in the body of Christ so that all the members of the body become responsible stewards of their own gifts.

Based on the Ephesians 4 model, all six students affirmed, some implicitly and some more explicitly, the need for plurality of leaders as opposed to the solo leadership model that they are used to. One of them recognized that as the leadership of the Holy Spirit, leading is accomplished through the exercise of the leadership gifts by the leaders. Another student was explicit in affirming that there should be no distinction between clergy and laity in the church, that priesthood of all believers should be exercised in every church ministry.

One of the students hinted on the area of decision-making, affirming the importance of the distribution of power in the church no matter what church governance model is adopted.

### Proclamation and Discipleship

All the students addressed the area of proclamation in their Ecclesiology papers. The gospel was not explicitly defined in the papers. However, proclaiming the gospel was clearly identified as in both word and deed, engaging all spheres of influence in the world. One student even explicitly mentioned creation care as one important dimension of proclamation. Social involvement and social care were highlighted in all the papers.

Not much was discussed in the area of discipleship. The goal of and need for discipleship in the church and the spiritual growth of believers were identified by most papers. However, there was no discussion on how disciples are made or how believers get discipled.

### Role of the Holy Spirit

The role of the Holy Spirit was highlighted in the papers mainly through the emphasis on spiritual gifts. The majority of students mentioned the importance of the leaders having the leadership spiritual gifts outlined in Ephesians 4: apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring, and teaching. Several of them also highlighted the importance of recognizing the spiritual gifts of every believer. The leadership of the Holy Spirit in the church was explicitly highlighted by one of the students.

The collective understanding of the students is that the Holy Spirit leads in the church when the leaders and the members of the church exercise the varied spiritual gifts distributed to them by the Holy Spirit.

### Ethics

Two characteristics were identified by many students as important in the life of the church and the life of its members. They are love and unity. These were found important by the students that built their understanding of the church on their understanding of the Trinity. In addition, two students identified the need for believers to walk in holiness, both to honor the image of God in them and to witness to others.

Six students highlighted the important connection between the church and society. The church impacts society through the proclamation of the gospel, both in word and deed, through acts of compassion, through the exercise of its prophetic voice, and through various other means. One student wrote that it was paramount for the church to engage society. Another stressed that the church needs to contextualize itself according to its surrounding society.

### *Student Self-Assessment*

One of the main tasks in designing the new curriculum was to develop a graduate profile. Every educational institution needs to develop different graduate

profiles for every program it offers. This is one way to measure whether the graduates are meeting the set standards of education. However, at ABTS, in addition to the profiles that state the program outcomes, another profile was developed that serves as a lifelong guideline to the characteristics of an ideal Christian leader serving in an Arab Muslim context.[392] This lifelong profile is taken very seriously at ABTS. Students assess themselves against this standard at the very beginning of their studies at ABTS, at the beginning of years two and three of their studies, and at the end of year three just before graduation. There are several reasons for that. First, this "becomes the basis for guided mentoring in the students' pilgrimage of growth"[393] during their studies. More importantly, however, is that the students learn the basic skill of assessing themselves against a lifelong standard, with the hope that they will continue to do that after they complete their studies and get engaged in ministry.

### Research Sample

Four self-assessments completed by each of the ten students of the Missional Ecclesiology course are worth additional consideration as part of this case study. These are students that demonstrated adequate understanding of missional topics and missional concerns by the end of their education at ABTS. Of interest, using their own self-assessment, is whether their understanding had grown from the time they joined ABTS until the time they graduated.

I will be looking specifically at items in the self-assessment that correlate with missional understanding. The first item of the self-assessment is in the section of sociological-cultural competencies. The item to be evaluated is the knowledge and understanding of the nature and impact of culture.

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[392] See Appendix 6.
[393] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 23.

Two items are evaluated from the section on personal-ministerial competencies. The first is critical understanding of the psychological and spiritual processes by which people grow in personal and corporate settings. The second item is the ability to interpret key ministerial issues through the multiple lenses of Bible, history, theology and context. The issues considered are Christian leadership, church planting and church growth, the teaching ministry of the church, Christian nurture and discipleship, Christian counseling, and preaching.

Two items are considered in the section on affective competencies. The first is a deep love for God's people and a desire to see the Church of Jesus Christ live out its missional calling. The second is knowledge of gifts and how to develop these gifts.

The last two issues are in the section on behavioral competencies. The first is the ability to create a leadership environment that is characterized by missional strategic vision and direction. The second is the ability to create a leadership environment that is characterized by team leadership and empowerment.

### Analysis of the Data

I am going to take two approaches in analyzing the data. First, I will look at how each student progressed through time. Then I will look at how all the students faired in each item queried.

Looking at the data by student, one student acknowledged significant improvement through time. Four students recognized consistent improvement throughout their time in all categories except for the skills section where one of the four students perceived they had declined to some extent. One student perceived improvement in some items after year 1 and improvement in other items after year 2. Another student was able to assess discernible improvement after year 1, then stayed at the same level after that. Two students did not recognize any discernible

improvement or decline throughout their time at ABTS. One student perceived they had declined to some extent throughout their studies. It is possible that some decline can be attributed to the fact that students score themselves more harshly as they grow in the areas evaluated.

Looking at the data by research item, this is what the results show. In response to the sociological-cultural competency item of knowledge and understanding of the nature and impact of culture, there is collective recognition of strong improvement after the end of the first year of studies, then slight improvement afterwards. Similarly, with the first personal-ministerial competency item on a critical understanding of the psychological and spiritual processes by which people grow in personal and corporate settings, they perceived significant improvement in understanding at the end of the first year, slight improvement afterwards.

The second item in the personal-ministerial competency item is on the ability to interpret key ministerial issues through the multiple lenses of Bible, history, theology, and context. For the issues of church planting and church growth, and Christian counseling, there is perception of steady improvement after each year of study. For the remaining issues of Christian leadership, the teaching ministry of the church, Christian nurture and discipleship, and preaching, they perceive discernible improvement after years one and three, but no observable improvement, if not slight decline, after the end of the second year.

They did not perceive any discernible improvement in the affective competency domain. In the behavioral competencies, there is recognition of significant improvement by the end of the first year, with no noticeable improvement afterwards.

## *Assessment Project*

### The Problem

It took around four years to develop the new ABTS curriculum, three years to implement it, and ongoing maintenance to sustain it. We did all that because we believed that the old model of theological education did not serve our context. The question then presented itself, how do we know that the new curriculum, the new model, is serving our context? How do we know that our curriculum is effective? By 2012, after graduating the first cohort from the new curriculum, our desire to assess the effectiveness of these changes rapidly grew.

At that time, Rupen Das, an expert in professional relief and community development and in integral mission, was serving at the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD). Rupen and I started a conversation about using the methodology of the professional development field to assess theological education, and precisely to measure the effectiveness of our new curriculum. We, at ABTS, declare that we are serving the Church, a missional church, in the Arab world by equipping leaders using our new curriculum. How do we know that we are achieving that? How do we know that the churches are being served? And how do we know that these churches are being missional in serving their communities? What adds to the complexity is the multiple layers of our constituency as a seminary. Our constituencies can be categorized in three concentric circles. The immediate constituency are the Lebanese Baptist churches, representing the inner circle. The middle circle represents all evangelical churches in Lebanon. The outer circle represents all evangelical churches all over the Arabic-speaking world, Middle East, North Africa, and the diaspora.

Rupen and I came up with a methodology and a plan to address the need for assessment in our complex context and diverse constituencies.

### The Theory

In order to assess the effectiveness of ABTS program and to measure its success, we developed the following program logic:

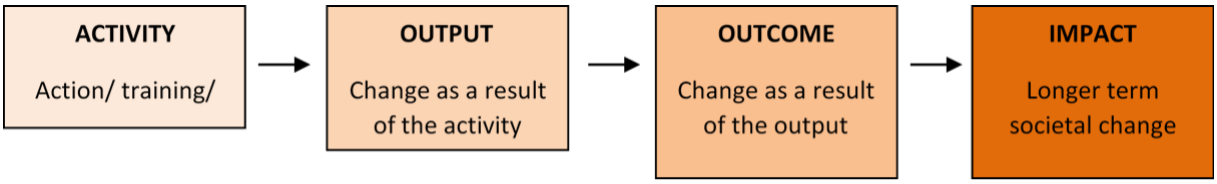


**Figure 5 - Assessment Program Logic**

The seminary *activity* is to train and equip leaders. However, the *activity* by itself does not mean anything. The number of students trained does not matter if nothing changed as a result of the training. Consequently, measuring the number of students trained each year is not a good measure of success. Undoubtedly, a minimum number of students is needed for an institution to be viable and sustainable; nonetheless, this is certainly not a sufficient measurement of success.

The challenge, therefore, is to assess the results of the training, the results of the *activity*. The assessment, according to this logic model, takes place at three levels, *output*, *outcome*, and *impact*.

*Output* is the direct result of the *activity*. ABTS's *activity* is to train leaders. Measuring effectiveness at the *output* level is to assess whether leaders were adequately trained or not. ABTS already had several tools that measure effectiveness at this level. Any educational institution needs to demonstrate that its graduates have acquired the needed competencies that are outlined in each program's learning outcomes. ABTS received accreditation from the European Evangelical Accrediting

Association, which clearly requires that.[394] We developed additional tools to measure effectiveness at the *output* level, including the self-assessment discussed in the previous section.

*Outcome* is the indirect result of the *activity*. ABTS trains leaders. However, the vision and mission of ABTS are not to train leaders. The vision and mission emphasize that its primary role is to serve the Church in the Arab world. It serves the Church by training leaders, as well as by developing learning resources. Therefore, it is not enough to say that ABTS graduates are adequately trained. That training does not matter if nothing changed at the level of the Church. Measuring effectiveness at the *outcome* level means measuring whether the training the students received at ABTS contributed to the life of their churches. If the graduates were transformed[395] themselves, and their ministry back in their churches was transformative, then ABTS can consider that it is being successful at the *outcome* level. ABTS did not have any tools that measure effectiveness at this level. New tools were developed, tested, and implemented.

*Impact* is the ultimate desired result of ABTS training. It is still not enough to know that a particular church was transformed through the ministry of ABTS graduates if that church is not impacting its surrounding society. Assessing *impact* includes measuring whether anything changed at the level of society. If a certain church community exists in a certain location, does that make a difference to its hosting society? For example, is the understanding of who God is changing in a

[394] "Manual with Visitation Guidelines of the European Evangelical Accrediting Association," (EEAA, 2012).

[395] With the new ABTS curriculum, the language of "transformation" started to be used. Transformation of the students through their theological education, meaning that they are getting closer to the ideal profile; and transformation of church communities, meaning that they are growing in their impact on their societies. Perry Shaw, "ABTS New Curriculum," (Mansourieh, Lebanon: ABTS, 2011), 46, 58.

particular neighborhood because there is a church community serving there? The vision and mission of ABTS are to serve the Church in the Arab world so that the Church proclaims Christ to society. If Christ is not being proclaimed to the surrounding societies by churches that employ[396] ABTS graduates, then the ministry of ABTS is not successful. Tools to measure *impact* were also developed. It is impossible, obviously, to attribute every change in society to the work of our graduates in their churches. Assessment at *impact* level is largely based on anecdotal evidence.

These are the important elements of the theory that were used in the assessment project at ABTS that started to take shape in 2012. Rupen Das documented that theory in detail, with its connection to theological education, in a recently published book.[397]

### The Research

A Canadian volunteer was recruited in 2012 to coordinate the research, document the results, and write a report on the findings. His name was Greg Matthews. He was a graduate of the International Development Program[398] of Humber College in Toronto, a program that Rupen Das started. Greg's familiarity with program development logic was very helpful for his role on the ABTS assessment project. However, Greg's lack of knowledge of the Arabic language required ABTS to recruit other local researchers to work alongside him.

At the time that the research was conducted during the second half of 2012, ABTS only had one cohort of graduates from the new curriculum. Although the main

[396] Not necessarily for pay.

[397] Rupen Das, *Connecting Curriculum with Context: A Handbook for Context Relevant Curriculum Development in Theological Education*, Icete Series (Langham Global Library, 2015).

[398] http://www.humber.ca/program/international-development

goal of the assessment was to evaluate the effectiveness of the new curriculum, the number of graduates did not provide a large enough sample for the data to be meaningful. The project management team[399] decided to include recent graduates from the old curriculum as well. The team thought that this was important for two main reasons. First, all feedback was valid feedback. Even feedback from graduates of the old curriculum should provide meaningful information. When their feedback suggested curricular changes, if these changes were already made in the new curriculum then that feedback would provide affirmation of the changes made. If there were no changes made in the new curriculum that address that feedback, then the data collected was as useful as feedback from graduates of the new curriculum. The second reason that graduates of the old curriculum were used is that the initial research conducted in 2012 also served as a baseline. Future research would be able to measure whether results improved in relation to the baseline.

The initial wave of research conducted during the academic year 2012-2013 included assessment at the *output* and *outcome* level. A questionnaire[400] was developed, tested and used to interview each graduate. Data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each graduate (or graduates, in the case of husband and wife team). These interviews took between twenty and forty minutes each.[401] This tool collected mainly *output* data. Another questionnaire[402] was developed, tested, and used with focus group interviews with members of each graduate's ministry (or graduates, in the case of husband and wife), key members of

[399] Rupen Das, Greg Matthews, and Elie Haddad
[400] See Appendix 7.
[401] More details can be found in Greg Matthews, *ABTS Impact Assessment: Reflection & Final Recommendations* (Mansourieh, Lebanon: ABTS, 2014).
[402] See Appendix 8.

their church, or colleagues in ministry.[403] This tool collected data at both the *output* level and *outcome* level.

The challenge of constituency and geographical location was the most difficult to overcome. The team decided to conduct the research in five different locations: Lebanon, Egypt, South Sudan, Tunisia, and Algeria. Nine graduates were included in the research in Lebanon, two from the new curriculum and seven from the old curriculum. Eight graduates were included in the research in Egypt, two from the new curriculum and six from the old curriculum. In South Sudan, five graduates were included, three from the new curriculum and two from the old curriculum. Four graduates were included in Algeria, two from the new curriculum and two from the old curriculum. Finally, two Egyptians serving in Tunisia were included in the research, both from the old curriculum. In total, twenty-eight graduates were included in the research, nine graduates of the new curriculum and nineteen graduates of the old curriculum.

The interviews and focus groups conducted in Lebanon, Egypt, and South Sudan were led by Greg and assisted by an ABTS staff member. An ABTS student conducted the research in Algeria and an ABTS faculty member conducted the research in Tunisia. Both student and faculty member were trained on using the tools by Greg before they traveled.

Later in 2013, a follow-up research was conducted at the *impact* level. A tool was developed, tested, and used in community-level interviews with people living in the neighborhoods of churches. The goal of this tool is to collect feedback pertaining to the impact of church communities and ministries where ABTS graduates are serving. The tool was designed to answer one main question: "if this church

[403] Matthews, *ABTS Impact Assessment: Reflection & Final Recommendations*.

disappeared tomorrow, would anyone around it notice?"[404] A questionnaire[405] was used to conduct the interviews. The *impact* research was only conducted in Egypt and Algeria by two ABTS students, an Egyptian and an Algerian respectively, who were trained by Greg on how to use the tool.

### The Results – Output and Outcome

After completing the *output* and *outcome* level research through graduate interviews and church community focus groups in the five countries researched, Greg Matthews, the lead researcher, compiled and summarized the findings and wrote a report.[406] The following excerpts are of note.

### General Themes and Trends

Greg identified a few challenges and training needs. One of these needs has to do with the posture of the church. "Many graduates spoke about churches in their context as inwardly focused and reluctant to change". They have the "challenge of effectively addressing needs in the wider community or becoming more missional".

### Lebanon - General

One of the main themes and trends identified for graduates of both old and new curriculum is the "desire to become more 'missional', to focus outward and to address needs in the community".

### Lebanon - New Curriculum

Greg identified the interviewed graduates as "ministering in their non-church places of work." One of the challenges faced in doing ministry in a Lebanese context as identified by these graduates is that "the Church is resistant to change", and that

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[404] Ibid., 3.
[405] See Appendix 9.
[406] Greg Matthews, *Impact Assessment Report: Findings for ABTS* (Mansourieh, Lebanon: ABTS, 2013).

there is a "need to train church members to become leaders." One of these graduates was quoted saying that it is "very important to build relationships with the community, with non-church people. Sometimes we look like an exclusive club."

### Lebanon – Old Curriculum

Some identified the ministry they are involved in as "Working to bring change in their church's governance structure; Creating a missional structure; … Horizontal/Flat Leadership". In answering what they had learned at ABTS, they identified "understanding the culture and context" and "Missionary work". One of the challenges facing the Lebanese context that they identified was a "lack of missional culture in churches". One of the church focus groups had this to say about their pastor, one of the graduates researched: "Pastor met with the mayor of community to find out local issues; church really aiming to be a missionary church".

### Egypt – General

Some of the themes and trends identified by the graduates are the "lack of 'missional' thinking, or community involvement of the Church", and a concern over "the Church's ability to witness in the community."

### Egypt – New Curriculum

What they found useful from ABTS and are using in ministry is "Community surveys".

### Egypt – Old Curriculum

One graduate did a study of how often Egyptian churches preach about certain topics. He commented that none of the "churches surveyed preach on 'missionary work' regularly." Another graduate commented: "Here people go to church to gain social status, to be accepted in the community."

The focus groups in Egypt identified one of their church ministries as "Training missional leaders", and identified "Missional ministry" as an important quality of an ideal Christian leader. When asked about challenges facing the Egyptian context, the focus groups identified as one of the challenges that the "Church is not reaching out to its community".

### Algeria – New Curriculum

When asked what they found useful from ABTS training and what they are using in ministry, their responses included "A new vision for society, helping churches to look outside their walls", and "Church and community". What they wish they had learned was "more on missions".

### Algeria – Old Curriculum

Some of the challenges identified in the Algerian context were "Cultural and ethnic challenges, as missionaries in their own country".

### Tunisia – Old Curriculum

The Egyptian couple who graduated from the old curriculum and is serving in Tunisia, when asked what they wish they had learned at ABTS, their response included "Applied mission". When asked how ABTS affected their personal sense of calling from God, one response: "It changed all my calling from the first day we entered the seminary… I never thought that it will also change my calling to be a missionary."

### South Sudan – Old Curriculum

One of the things identified that they wish they had learned at ABTS was a "deeper look into 'missional' concepts". One of the challenges facing the church in a South Sudanese context is that the Anglican church is "closed to the idea of ministering outside the church". In response to how ABTS affected their personal

sense of calling, one graduate learned "that they were called to be an evangelist, and called to missional ministry as well".

### The Results – Impact

Greg, later in 2013, also compiled two reports[407] that summarize the results of the *impact* research conducted in Egypt and Algeria. All quotations under this heading, unless otherwise noted, are taken from these two reports.

#### Algerian Community Survey

The context of the Algerian church is predominantly Muslim communities. This is highly reflected in the answers gathered by the survey.

The communities where the surveyed churches are serving are well aware of the presence of the churches among them, regardless of whether they have positive feelings towards them or negative. The churches seem to have good relationships with their surrounding communities, especially one village church that has put on several public social events.

When the surveyed individuals were asked what they knew about the beliefs of the church in their community, they think that the Christians believe that the prophet Issa is the son of God. Some kept repeating that these Christians are infidels and traitors, but the majority had a more balanced opinion about them. One individual even gave this answer: "They believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and that he loves the whole world and died for all."

When asked what they thought the role of the church should be within the community, some said that there should be no church in a Muslim community. The majority, however, indicated that the church should be helping those in need. "The

[407] Greg Matthews, *Community Level Interviews - Egypt Overview* (Mansourieh, Lebanon: ABTS, 2013); Greg Matthews, *Community Level Interviews - Algeria Overview* (Mansourieh, Lebanon: ABTS, 2013).

role of the church should be providing charity to the community, such as providing medicine, food, and social aids."

Answering the question of whether the church is a positive element or negative element in the community, the answers were split. Many thought that the church was a negative element in the community because it is a "deviation from Islamic religion", and that there is the danger that children in the community will be exposed to "bad Western culture". They saw Christians as a threat. They are evil and infidels. Many others, however, thought that Christians are good people, peaceful, and love others. The presence of Christians is important "in order to create a balance, to be an example of coexistence, acceptance and freedom for all of Algeria."

When asked whether they have friends who are believers, again some responded with harsh answers: "they are infidels how can I be in relationship with them." The majority, however, indicated that they had friends from church, that they are really good people, behave well, they love people and can be trusted. They "love the country and pray for it." One person expressed: "I like their commitment, love for each other and unity. See how they call each other: 'Brothers'… Are we going to learn from them?"

When asked about their view of God, their answers included "the Creator of all things", "a great power", "Forgiving, Merciful, able to do everything, but His punishment is severe and He is remote and holy so that man cannot access Him."

When asked to reflect on the meaning of reconciliation, forgiveness, acceptance, and justice, the majority indicated that there is no justice or equality apart from Islam. "Acceptance is in Islam and for those who follow it." Justice "is equality among people following the right." "Forgiveness is from God through good deeds."

Some, however, indicated that people should be free to choose their own religion. "We are all the sons of Adam."

### Egyptian Community Survey

The Egyptian context is different from the Algerian. The communities surveyed were mixed Christian and Muslim. The answers clearly reflect that.

People in the community are well aware of the presence of the churches among them. They are well known. Nevertheless, their relationship with the churches is through the pastors. Relationships with church members are scarce and shallow.

When asked what they thought the churches believe in, the responses were consistent that "Jesus Christ is God; this is the essence of the church's faith in addition to rebirth and transformation". They thought that the churches teach "the word of our Lord."

When asked what they thought the role of the churches in the community should be, the majority related their answers to the pastor. Whatever good the churches are doing are a direct result of the work of the pastors. Some indicated that the role of the church should be to "get off the pulpits… go down among the people and serve them", provide "social services to the poor".

When asked whether they thought the churches were a positive or a negative element in the community, their answers were more on the neutral side. They indicated that if the church members get out of their isolation and provide more care then they would become a positive element.

In response to whether they have any relationship with church members, again the answer was that they have shallow relationships. Their primary relationship is with the pastor.

Responding to what they believed about God, the answers were consistent: "God is love", "God is life", "he is the wonderful heavenly father", "God is able, loving, tolerant, forgiving, redeemer", "He is supposed to be everything in our lives".

When asked to reflect on the values of reconciliation, forgiveness, acceptance, and justice, their answers were also consistent. Reconciliation is through the blood of Christ. "The church should live this reconciliation with others". Forgiveness "is the greatest expression of love". "Acceptance is grace". Their view of justice, however, was that it was lacking in their communities. "None in our society is experiencing justice". "The church lacks living this justice".

### Observations and Analysis

In comparing the results coming out of the two different contexts, there are a few observations that can be made.

First, within the Algerian Muslim context, their understanding of God and of Kingdom values is typical for a Muslim community, whereas within the mixed Egyptian context their understanding of God and His values are more aligned with a Biblical worldview.

Second, the church has been present in Egyptian communities for a long time. It is a well-accepted fact and does not seem to create any controversy. However, the impact of the church on its surrounding society is minimal. Shallow relationships exist between church members and their neighbors. On the other hand, the presence of church in Algeria is still problematic. Churches are not mainstream. Therefore, they elicit strong reactions, whether negative or positive. The impact of the churches on their surrounding societies can be more widely discerned in the Algerian context than in the Egyptian context. For the mainstream church in Egypt to have an impact on society, things may have to change.

**The Response of the Lebanese Baptist Churches to times of Crises (2011 to 2020)**

The behavior of churches and church leaders in Lebanon has shifted since I first conducted my field research in 2011. The reasons for these shifts in the way the Lebanese Baptist churches think and behave are due in some part to the changes in theological education as presented above in the second case study, and also to God's transformational work within the congregations.

While theological education is intentional in its goal of affecting change in thinking and behavior, recent events of great impact in the country were not planned and the outcome was not deliberate. The Syrian war and resulting humanitarian crisis, the economic decline, the uprising that started on 17 October 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Beirut explosion of 4 August 2020 are significant events which have influenced change in the Lebanese Baptist churches. In this case study, I offer summaries of how two churches and the seminary have and are changing in light of these events. I also offer the observations of an independent researcher who has noted how the churches are changing.

### *Zahle Church*

The Zahle Baptist Church, also known as True Vine Baptist Church,[408] presents a key example of transformation that resulted from the church's response to the humanitarian crisis.[409] This part of the case study presents a brief history and context, by interviewing someone from inside the community - the church's pastor, and by interviewing one from outside, a witness account.

[408] The name of the church is a play on words. Zahle is known for its vineyards and for its "Festival of the Vine." Paul Doyle, *Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (England: Bradt Travel Guides Ltd, 2017), 254.

[409] Although case studies as a research tool have their weaknesses - where the findings cannot always be generalized, Ian Hussey makes the argument that a carefully selected case study can "contribute significantly to knowledge" when studying congregations. Ian Hussey, "Leadership in Effective and Growing Australian Congregations: A Study of Three Cases," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 12, no. 1 (2013): 69.

## Background and Context

Zahle[410] is situated in the middle of the Bekaa valley in-between the two Lebanese mountain ranges, and is the capital of the Bekaa Governorate[411]. It is Lebanon's only city not located on the coast, around fifty kilometers east of Beirut and just north of the Beirut-Damascus highway. Zahle is the third largest city in Lebanon after Beirut and Tripoli, and is the largest Christian city. More than ninety percent of its inhabitants are Christians.

Zahle played a strategic role in the Lebanese civil war (1975 – 1990). Because of its strategic location, it "served as a key artery for the armed factions involved in the conflict, particularly for the Syrian Armed Forces who occupied the adjacent Bekaa Valley from May 1976."[412] In addition, a vicious battle took place in Zahle between December 1980 and June 1981.[413] The Lebanese Forces[414] (the Christian militia), assisted by local resistance groups from Zahle, were on one side of the battle. On the other side was the Syrian Army.

The inhabitants of Zahle are known for their "religious devotion." They "display a pride with their religious identity."[415] The majority of Syrians, on the other hand, are Muslims: Sunni, including Kurds; and Shia, including Alawites.[416]

The political and military wars between Zahle and Syria, coupled with the historic religious tension between Christians and Muslims, has caused the inhabitants of the city of Zahle, the Christians, to have bad relations with the Syrian Muslims, to

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[410] Zahle can also be spelled Zahlé or Zahleh.

[411] Doyle, *Lebanon*, 253-254.

[412] "Battle of Zahleh", Wikipedia Encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Zahleh (accessed 30 October 2020).

[413] Ibid.

[414] Their web site is http://www.lebanese-forces.com.

[415] "Zahlé", Wikipedia Encyclopedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zahl%C3%A9 (accessed 30 October 2020).

[416] "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria", U.S. Department of State - Office of Inbternational Religious Freedom https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/syria/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

the degree of hatred. These negative feelings between the two had been harbored for many years.

## An Insider Account[417]

### Beginnings of the Church

It is in this context that the Baptist Church in Zahle was born. Jihad Haddad, a young and energetic evangelist and preacher from Ain Dara Baptist Church, with fellow evangelists, started leading home meetings in the city of Zahle. That was in 1990, right after the end of the Lebanese Civil War. Starting an evangelical ministry in Zahle was not easy. The strong fanaticism in Zahle resulted in high anti-evangelical sentiments. Regardless, the ministry grew slowly but surely.

According to Jihad, this is how the ministry of the church started. In 2002, the home group became a church; they rented an apartment to meet in, and appointed Jihad as their first pastor. The ministry continued to grow in the new location until the space became too tight for them. In 2010, they started praying about a space of their own, a space that can grow as the ministry grows. Two years later, in 2012, God answered their prayers and provided a piece of land and adequate funding for them to build. It was at the time when they could not fit the growing numbers in the old space, and the owner of the rented apartment wanted it back very badly. Within a few months they were able to build a structure with enough space to move their operation to. That was in May 2012.

When they moved to their new location, they were praying that God would bless their ministry. They had a vision for building a safe house where followers of

[417] Jihad Haddad, interview by author, 23 July 2014. The interview was audio recorded. The language of the interview was in Lebanese Arabic (colloquial Arabic with some English phrases interspersed). The audio recording was transcribed and translated to English by Ali Khalil who is fluent and can think analytically in both languages.

Jesus from non-Christian background can come and find a safe place to stay. No one could have predicted what was going to happen next and that the church will become an aid and a refuge for hundreds, maybe thousands, of people.

### The Humanitarian Crisis

The troubles in Syria began in March of 2011 as local uprisings, which quickly shifted into nation-wide protests, resulting in a full-scale civil war. By the end of 2011 there were already five thousand Syrian refugees in north Lebanon.[418] By the end of 2012 there were 129,106 Syrian refugees in Lebanon who were registered with the United Nations.[419] In addition, around 40,000 refugees were awaiting registration plus an unknown number of refugees who did not want to register for security or other reasons. By the end of 2013 the number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon had grown to 805,835.[420] This is a staggering number compared to the population of Lebanon.

Around 40%[421] of the refugees end up in the Bekaa area in and around the city of Zahle. Although around 10% of the Syrian population is Christian, more Syrian Christian refugees tend to come to Zahle because of its large Christian population and because many of them have extended family there.

### Getting Engaged in Relief Work

By the time the church moved into its new location, which is in the center of the city, there was already a large number of Syrian refugees near the church. That summer, Jihad remembers that he was teaching a series about the prayer of Jabez,

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[418] Antoine Amrieh, "Nearly 5,000 Syrian Refugees in North Lebanon," *The Daily Star* (2011). http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Dec-17/157156-nearly-5000-syrian-refugees-in-north-lebanon.ashx#axzz1hIn5McHC (accessed 30 October 2020).

[419] "Syrian Regional Refugee Response", UNHCR http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122 (accessed 30 October 2020).

[420] Ibid.

[421] Ibid.

about dreaming big. By September 2012 one of the members approached him, asking for the first time: “there are a lot of Syrian refugees around us, can we do something to help them?” Jihad’s answer was a simple “I don’t know how we can help them, and we are still paying for what we owe on the property and its furnishing.”

Jihad was a board member of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD)[422]. A new arm of the ministry was starting at LSESD at that time, a relief and community development initiative. Just five days after Jihad received that request from his church member, he was attending a board meeting at LSESD. They were discussing the relief ministry. A report was presented stating that LSESD had received funds to aid refugees and were looking for someone they trusted in the Zahle area to assist one hundred families for six months. Jihad brought the news back to that interested member. The news made him ecstatic. They put a plan together to start assisting Syrian refugee families. The initial plan was to give half the assistance to Christian refugees and half to Muslim refugees. This is how the relief ministry at the Baptist Church in Zahle started.

The ministry quickly grew. They gave assistance to hundreds of families, they started a school for the Syrian children who could not assimilate into the Lebanese schooling system, and they started worship services, discipleship groups, and home groups that have Syrians as their focus.

### Challenges Facing the Church

The church was not prepared or adequately organized for this type of ministry. The problem was not theological. Even though the tradition of the Lebanese Baptist

[422] LSESD is a “Lebanese faith-motivated organization with a holistic approach that seeks to strengthen the local Church and serve the local community” "Lebanese Society for Educational & Social Development", Lebanese Society for Educational & Social Development https://www.lsesd.org/our-story/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

churches has been against social action, this was not the case in the church in Zahle. The traditional teaching in the Lebanese Baptist churches[423] was that the responsibility of the church is spiritual. The social and humanitarian work is the responsibility of social and humanitarian organizations. Jihad's thinking was different due to his own study of the Bible. What helped is that the church in Zahle was a young church, and the majority of its members came to faith and were discipled in it. There were not many transfer members. Jihad's understanding of the mission of the church was the teaching that the members grew up on. This was part of the DNA of the church. Therefore, the problem was not theological.

The first challenge was practical. The church was not logistically prepared for this type of operation, and the growth of the ministry took them by surprise. They did not have the dedicated people, the infrastructure, the expertise, or the experience needed. The church responded to this challenge by developing a good structure. Several people were given responsibilities in this ministry, and they were empowered to make decisions. The ministry could not have flourished had Jihad been a controlling leader. He runs a successful business as he is leading the church, in addition to many other ministry involvements. Many leaders have emerged as a result of that, including many Syrian refugees who have come to faith and have become members of the church.

The second challenge was internal to the church. They had a love problem. The majority of the members of the church still did not have compassion for the Syrians, especially the Muslim Syrians. Many members were against this ministry. But as this humanitarian ministry took hold of the church, the hearts of the members were getting changed. One day a member would come and complain about the church

[423] As observed by Jihad.

putting all this effort in helping Syrian refugees, the next day that member will come asking how he can help his refugee neighbor. Jihad recalls a member who did not like the Syrians at all, yet every month he would take seven food packages to distribute to seven Syrian families.

The third challenge was at the level of the neighborhood. The neighbors did not appreciate at all what the church was doing. The church building is located in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Hundreds of refugees, mostly veiled, would line up the street waiting to be helped. This was not a familiar or welcomed scene. And the cars blocked the parking spots of the neighbors. That caused ill feelings among them. Many of them had been hurt by Syrians and by Muslims. They became upset, protested regularly and filed complaints to the municipality accusing the church with causing religious turmoil.

The church responded to this challenge not by fighting the neighbors but by reaching out to them. The church started visiting the neighbors and giving food portions to them as well. They made the decision that ten to fifteen percent of the assistance will go to Lebanese families, to the host community. The refugee crisis was creating a lot of hardship for Lebanese families as well. They figured that the only way to keep doing the ministry is to care for the Lebanese neighbors and not just for the Syrian refugees. At the same time, they took active measures to improve the flow of traffic. They organized themselves to get rid of lineups on the streets, and they appointed church members to guide the cars in where to park. As a result of this effort among the neighbors, the majority of them started to appreciate what the church was doing and how it was helping the poor and the needy.

Another challenge was a spiritual challenge. Although the aid that the refugees were getting was not conditional on them attending church services, a large number of

them was eager to hear the message. They were intrigued that the Zahle Christian community that was supposed to hate Syrian Muslims are the ones helping them and caring for them. They wanted to hear their message. The meeting hall in the church was not large enough to seat the growing numbers. They had to start a second service for the Syrians. Having a separate service for Lebanese and Syrians had its advantages. The Syrians needed to hear about the foundations of the faith using a vocabulary that they could understand. The Lebanese needed topics that are more advanced. However, there were many disadvantages to the segregation. Having the two communities apart would not be helpful in the efforts of changing hearts to bring the two peoples together. The segregation would only reinforce the prejudices.

The church found a way to respond to this challenge. They split the meetings but did not ask the Lebanese to attend one and the Syrians to attend the other. They just started a simpler, more evangelistic second service. The majority of Syrians tend to go to the second service while there is intentional effort that enough Lebanese would attend that service too to provide hospitality and guidance. At the same time, Syrians that are growing in their faith and are being discipled are being drawn to the first service where the majority are Lebanese. The two-service solution ended up creating capacity to host the growing numbers, and creating the right environment for both groups of people, while working hard on countering the disadvantages.

### Impact on the Ministry of the Church

The ministry among the Syrian refugees has brought about astonishing results. If success is to be measured in numbers, the church has seen incredible numbers. New blood has flooded the church, not just by traditional Christians but also by Muslims. The numbers of Muslims coming to faith and being baptized is unprecedented. People from backgrounds that no one expected to see in local Lebanese churches, especially

in Zahle. What is significant is that new believers from the Muslim Syrian communities started to lead Lebanese from Zahle to the faith. But success in numbers did not only mean new blood. It also included number of church members who became seriously involved and committed to the ministry. That, too, was unprecedented.

This growth has led to the rise of dozens of discipleship groups. A few of these groups targeted believers who were being trained in leading others to Christ, and the rest of the groups had the objectives of evangelism and discipleship in the foundations of the faith. The growth in the number of groups required growth in leaders who were able to lead such groups.

The impact, however, was not only felt internally. The church ministry among refugees had a big impact on the neighbors of the church who began to appreciate the value of the ministry. This impact extended to the municipality officials and to leaders from other Christian denominations. Those that resisted and fought this ministry initially became strong believers in the need for it and were inspired by it.

It is also noteworthy to mention that the Syrian communities who were benefitting from the ministry of the church started to bond together. Syrians were deeply divided in their country, and the refugees were divided as well and had brought their conflicts with them. However, the church in Zahle did not give room for political discussions. The Syrian refugees quickly learned that the church operated by different values, and those values started to shape their own attitudes and behavior. As a result, the Syrians started to act as one group regardless of their backgrounds and differences.

Another area that saw major changes is missiological. The Christian believing community learned how to be tolerant towards Muslims and their habits and

traditions. They learned to be accepting of new manifestations of faith and forms of being followers of Christ that they were not comfortable with before. They learned to appreciate the different faith journey that Muslims take as they grow in their faith. They learned to have acceptance for wearing head covering and fasting in Ramadan. This is a major change for a local church in Lebanon that was so used to homogeneity.

### Vision for the Future

The church in Zahle is faced with a difficult question. What is its vision for the future? When the church is responding to a crisis and is operating in an exceptional mode, what does it do when the crisis is over and its response to it is complete? What happens when the war ends in Syria and the refugees go back? Jihad had a few things to say about this. First, the war does not seem to be ending soon. Second, it is unlikely that all the refugees can go back or want to go back. Many will stay behind. However, according to Jihad, it does not matter. The church will continue to serve. According to Jihad, their perspective on ministry has changed. If the Syrians stay they will continue serving them and ministering to them. If they leave then they will continue serving the growing number of Lebanese on one hand. On the other hand, they will follow the Syrians back to Syria to help them establish home groups back in their own communities. God has not given the church a vision for Syrians for a transient time. Rather, God has given them a vision for Syria in addition to Lebanon. They remain committed to ministry and they expect that it will continue to grow no matter what the circumstances or demographics are. The church has been transformed. Things will not go back to where they were before the crisis.

### Changes in the Pastor

Not only did the church change and the ministry change, the crisis changed the pastor as well. When asked about how he was changed, Jihad highlighted a few areas.

First, the crisis has reinforced what he believes about the integral Gospel, a Gospel of word and deed. The church's response to the humanitarian crisis was not viewed as an optional ministry and was not born out of a spirit of adventure. It was the result of conviction in what it means to proclaim the Gospel.

Second, the crisis reinforced Jihad's understanding and practice of leadership. It strengthened his delegation and empowerment style. He found himself becoming more of a coach than a player. Jihad became convinced that this leadership style provides a solid foundation for teamwork and maximizes involvement in ministry.

What the crisis did, most importantly, according to Jihad, is that it gave him more enthusiasm about the ministry. The crisis gave him a push in his faith. It gave him boldness and higher expectations of God showing Himself through miracles. It also taught him how to think better, how to understand people from different backgrounds better; and wisdom to deal with them according to their needs.

### An Outsider Account[424]

As the war was expanding in Syria and the humanitarian crisis started to affect Lebanon, Rupen Das was serving as the Director of Relief and Development at the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD). In my attempt to uncover a true account of what changed at the Zahle Baptist Church as a result of the war, I emailed Rupen on 20 August 2014 asking him for his witness and perspective on what changed and how things changed. He responded to me in an email on 26 August 2014. This section is based on Rupen's observations in his own account.

[424] This section is based on an email interview, in English, that I conducted with Rupen Das. Rupen Das, personal communication with author, 26 August 2014.

According to Rupen's observations, most of the Baptist churches in Lebanon, prior to the Syrian war, adopted a dispensational theology. They believed that the role of the church was to evangelize and not to provide social assistance. They "believed in not responding to social issues in the community because the most important thing was the salvation of souls."[425] Added to that was the hatred that Lebanese experienced towards Syrians because of their occupation of Lebanon and their involvement in its civil war.

LSESD is a church-based organization. Their plan for help during the refugee crisis was to be implemented through the local churches. The prevalent theology in the churches, coupled with the memory of Syrian involvement in Lebanon, proved to be major hindrances to the church's engagement in relief work. In the early days of the crisis, LSESD was criticized by the church pastors that they are promoting a 'social gospel'. And, Rupen as a foreigner, was criticized for "not understanding what the Syrians had done to Lebanon."

When the crisis reached "catastrophic proportions", several Baptist pastors, including Jihad Haddad, decided to respond to the humanitarian needs, thus going "against public opinion in the country." LSESD, along with Tearfund UK[426] and World Vision Lebanon,[427] started to provide training for these churches. The training included community assessment, managing a relief response, international humanitarian standards, and collecting data to be used in reporting. The team from Zahle Baptist Church was heavily involved in all areas of training and worked closely with LSESD to determine size and composition of rations, procurement procedures,

[425] Ibid.

[426] Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency based in the UK. Their web site is http://www.tearfund.org.

[427] World Vision is also a Christian relief and development agency. They have an office in Lebanon that has been active since the beginning of the civil war in 1975. Their web site is http://www.wvi.org/lebanon.

and the "issue of conditionality in providing assistance." The objective and strategy of LSESD was to help the churches "be churches and not social service organizations." LSESD continued to support the churches by providing project cycle management and building capacity within the churches.

Rupen observes that the key things that happened at Zahle Baptist Church were the following: First, the decision to provide a humanitarian response was their own decision. "They owned the initiative." Second, they considered what they were doing as very much part of the mission of the church and the greater mission of God. They were able to assimilate their training and were able to communicate it to others. According to Rupen, these churches always understood the importance of the verbal proclamation of the gospel. What they learned through the crisis is that by coupling this verbal proclamation with "demonstrating unconditional love to those who used to be your enemies has tremendous spiritual impact." This is what *integral mission*[428] looks like. Rupen adds that the experience of Zahle Baptist Church is being replicated by at least eighteen other churches in Lebanon.

### *Hadath Baptist Church*

Hadath Baptist Church is one of the five congregations that I included in the field research presented in the first section of this chapter. This church has experienced tremendous change and growth during the time of the Syrian war and humanitarian crisis. Its pastor, Hikmat Kashouh, recently published a book that documented their journey of change while providing some principles and guidelines

[428] *Integral Mission* is a term, adopted by the Micah Network (http://www.micahnetwork.org), that originated in Latin America and has been in use for many years, describing a "more holistic approach to Christian mission." *Integral Mission* is "the means designed by God to carry out, within history, his purpose of love and justice revealed in Jesus Christ, through the church and in the power of the Spirit." C. René Padilla, "What Is Integral Mission?." http://www.dmr.org/images/pdf%20dokumenter/C._René_Padilla_-_What_is_integral_mission.pdf (accessed 30 October 2020).

for congregational leadership in a time like this. The book is titled *Following Jesus in Turbulent Times: Disciple-Making in the Arab World*.[429] In this section, I will highlight a few insights from Kashouh that shed some light on changes in thinking and practice during this journey of change. I will restrict my comments to the areas that directly relate to my research questions.

At the time that Kashouh became pastor in 2008, the church was a "fairly typical Middle Eastern church, with an average attendance of about seventy people on Sunday mornings."[430] Kashouh was not satisfied with what he called a "typical Middle Eastern leadership model,"[431] where the pastor is the father figure and the rest of the family are all below him. Kashouh was convinced that "this leadership model was preventing the church from growing."[432] Consequently, Kashouh started developing a new leadership structure early on in his pastoral term. He started by listening to the congregation, casting a vision, empowering individuals, and working through a "continuous cycle of structuring, reviewing, and restructuring as the church grew."[433]

One of the first things that changed at the church was their vision for ministry, a holistic understanding of ministry, a church that does not view its role as being limited to verbal proclamation. The church started to understand its part in transforming society.[434]

Another thing that changed was a focus on organization and structure. Kashouh asserts that "[i]n order to flourish and be fruitful, churches need strong

[429] Hikmat Kashouh, *Following Jesus in Turbulent Times: Disciple-Making in the Arab World*, Kindle ed. (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2018).
[430] Ibid., 392.
[431] Ibid., 394.
[432] Ibid., 395.
[433] Ibid., 404.
[434] Ibid., 723.

governance and a healthy structure."[435] The right structure empowers people.[436] Hence, a lot of effort was put on enhancing structure.

In this journey of change, there was a recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit who is "the one who grows the fruit of the Spirit in us."[437] And it is this fruit of the Spirit, "fully embraced and boldly lived out, is the key to the transformation of the Arab world."[438]

The key to change, however, is leadership. Kashouh notes that one reason why churches in the Arab world are not growing is that "most pastors are only shepherding their churches, not leading them."[439] Leaders should be skilled in leading large multi-ethnic church.[440] With this understanding it becomes important that every mature leader be involved in mentoring and training potential leaders.[441] After all, congregations mirror their leaders.[442]

### *Independent Case Study*

Kathryn Kraft, a lecturer in International Development and a specialist in faith and humanitarianism, has conducted research among a network of evangelical churches in Lebanon. This case study targeted churches that have been involved in humanitarian work among Syrian refugees. The aim of this research was to present a critique of common understandings in the international development world of the principle of impartiality. The data was collected in 2014 and the research was

[435] Ibid., 2153.
[436] Ibid., 2166.
[437] Ibid., 1189.
[438] Ibid., 1284.
[439] Ibid., 2211.
[440] Ibid., 2197.
[441] Ibid., 766.
[442] Ibid., 2534.

published in 2015.[443] Some of Kraft's observations, analyses, and conclusions are relevant to this research.

Kraft started her paper by making three observations for why these churches provided an interesting case study for humanitarian work among faith communities.

The first observation was that very few of the leaders and members of the churches researched "had ever engaged in humanitarian response prior to the influx of Syrian refugees that began in 2011." They suddenly found themselves surrounded by "extreme levels of need." Their motivation was based on "a combination of obligation, compassion, and an opportunity presented by LSESD." [444]

The second observation was that this network of evangelical churches have a strong doctrine and mandate for evangelism. Their natural preference was to "provide spiritual salvation for eternity than physical salvation to the present." Although these church communities came to the belief in the need for impartiality and non-conditionality, they were "not willing to compromise their belief that the most important assistance they can provide… is the message of their faith."[445]

The third observation was based on Kraft's acknowledgment that the providers in this case are Lebanese Christians, the majority of beneficiaries are Syrian Muslims, and there is a history of tension between Lebanese and Syrians and between Christians and Muslims. Kraft observed that "the very existence of their humanitarian work signifies a victory of faith-motivated compassion over historic animosity."[446]

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[443] Kathryn Kraft, "Faith and Impartiality in Humanitarian Response: Lessons from Lebanese Evangelical Churches Providing Food Aid," *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 897-898 (2015).

[444] Ibid., 5. LSESD refers to the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (www.lsesd.org).

[445] Ibid., 6.

[446] Ibid.

In her paper, Kraft argued that these faith communities presented a different understanding of impartiality. To them, impartiality was not accomplished by refraining from presenting their faith message. Rather, their impartiality was accomplished through relationship building. These churches came to see their humanitarian work as secondary ministry while their evangelism remained their primary calling. They did not want to use their assistance as a means of coercion. They "distinguished between using food to pressure beneficiaries, and using food as a starting point for building relationships."[447] Serving a small number of beneficiaries, but building deeper relationships, became more important than serving a larger number without a relationship. As the churches wrestled with how to apply impartiality, they learned what they deemed as a more important principle, that of human dignity. This was an important but difficult lesson to learn.

An LSESD staff member working with this network of churches observed that "this expansion of the role of the churches beyond merely religious activities was more in keeping with what a faith community should be."[448]

This focus on relationships and human dignity seems to have been well appreciated by the beneficiaries, concludes Kraft. They appreciated the time spent in building relationships, and they found this as an appropriate way of ensuring that aid was given to the most vulnerable. One long-time beneficiary commented that "the church had become an integral part of his life and community."[449]

**More Crises**

Ten years of a humanitarian crisis have really taken their toll on Lebanon, which already had a broken infrastructure. On top of that, even before the

[447] Ibid., 13.
[448] Ibid., 15.
[449] Ibid., 16.

humanitarian crisis subsides, a fresh set of crises hit Lebanon in the last couple of years. In 2019, Lebanon experienced a downward-spiraling economy. Lebanon had been suffering for many years under the authority of a corrupt political system, where the political elite robbed the country of most of its resources. A lot has been written about Lebanon's corruption and its impact. Robert Fisk, a British journalist who had done extensive work in Lebanon and the region, provides a good analysis of the situation.[450] This economic downturn led to an uprising in October 2019. The economy continued to break down. Capital control measures were put in place whereby the Lebanese could no longer access their savings or transfer hard currency outside the country. This resulted in hyperinflation, a loss of around seventy percent of the purchasing power of the citizens, loss of jobs, increased poverty, and a higher rate of emigration of young professionals.

Within this economic meltdown, the coronavirus pandemic hit. This exacerbated the situation even further, leading to more businesses closing and more jobs lost. The situation took an even more dramatic turn in August 2020 with the huge explosion at the port of Beirut that destroyed a big part of the city. The results of this blast were devastating, especially coming at the heels of so much brokenness and suffering.[451]

Lebanon is still trying to reel from these calamities. Not many have been able to step back and reflect on how these disruptions have shaped the Church. However, it

[450] Robert Fisk, "How Do You Save a Truly Corrupt Country Like Lebanon?," *The Independent* (2020). https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/robert-fisk-lebanon-beirut-explosion-corruption-government-resign-hezbollah-assad-sisi-b1642016.html (accessed 19 November 2020).

[451] For further reading on the recent economic situation in Lebanon: The World Bank, "The World Bank in Lebanon: Overview" https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#1 (accessed 20 November 2020).

is easy to observe that the churches have been through a major transformation. The way they responded to the crises is noticeable.

In my experience during the Lebanese civil war in 1975-1990, the Church was mostly silent and in hiding, in self-preservation mode. Immediately after the explosion in 2020 and for many weeks, one did not have to wander far in downtown Beirut to witness the hands and feet of Jesus in action. Church members were filling the streets sweeping, cleaning, healing, feeding, repairing, caring, and doing everything that they believed the Church should do in response to such devastation. We had this similar experience at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. When the explosion hit, the same day we opened up our guesthouse and dormitories to house families that suddenly lost their homes. We did not stop to think about it or to pray about it. It was the most natural thing to do. This is a strong indication of a transformed understanding of the identity and the role of the Church. The story in Lebanon is still unfolding. No doubt a lot of research will be generated out of the Church's new response.

## *Interpreting the Two Data Sets According to the Seven Categories*

From the two sets of data – the field research and the case studies, it is clear that changes have taken place in the Lebanese Baptist churches over the years. The history and identity of the church as I remember it and as described in Chapter Two from its inception to 1990 when I moved to Canada is different from the church described in the field research (2005 to 2011) and evidenced in response to significant political and cultural events (2011 to 2020). In the following final section of this

chapter, I offer my autoethnographic reflections and interpretation of the nature of the changes according to the seven aspects of the church used in the field research.

**Mission**

The traditional understanding of mission by the local Lebanese Baptist community was very limited, as evidenced by the field research. Mission was seen as one of the internal functions of the church, but not supported by adequate organizational structures to fulfill this function. Mission was mostly understood as evangelism and the verbal proclamation of the Gospel.

The humanitarian crisis resulted in a major change in the understanding of mission. What I found intriguing is that this change was not motivated by a renewed understanding of the churches' theology or missiology. It was the crisis that prompted a change in practice, which eventually prompted different churches to rethink their theology and missiology. Rupen Das identified missiological changes as one of the primary effects of the humanitarian crisis.[452] The churches involved in caring for Syrian refugees were eventually able to see what they were doing as part of the mission of the church and the mission of God. The majority of church members were engaged in this mission. Their perspective on ministry changed. The focus was no longer to serve the internal functions of the church. Instead, the churches started to explore new opportunities for ministry among the refugee population, whether while they are displaced in Lebanon or when they eventually go back to their country. The churches gained a vision for mission that was not present before.

This vision for mission solidified even further after the many crises that the county lived through recently. The role of the church in physical and social action is no longer in question. The question was no longer whether a church should be

[452] Das, personal communication with author, 26 August 2014.

involved in serving its society. The question, rather, became how much evangelism can accompany these social responses. To obtain adequate answers to this foundational question is necessitating the churches to revisit their theology and understanding of their role in the world, which is producing a closer alignment between the theology and the praxis.

Theological education has a significant influence on the understanding of mission. It is clear from students engaged in thinking about missional ecclesiology that their grasp of the concept of mission has changed. After I finished teaching the Missional Ecclesiology course one year, one of my students came to my office to talk to me. He grew up going to church and was a leader in his church. He said that it had never occurred to him before that the role of mission is the responsibility of the church. This was never taught or practiced in his church. The course produced a complete change in paradigm. In addition, students started to connect their missional understanding to their understanding of theology, such as trinity and the Kingdom of God. They recognized that mission touches all spheres of influence in a person's life and that the work of mission is the work of every believer.

The self-assessment affirmed that the students perceived themselves as maturing in their grasp of the impact of church and culture and how to evaluate life and ministry through the lenses of Bible, history, theology and context. Having these skills in their ministry consciousness changes the way they view their mission after they go back to their communities, as evidenced by the assessment project. Research among graduates reveals how they started to evaluate their ministries and the ministries of their church communities based on their missional engagement. They started to use their skills in developing and conducting community surveys in order to engage their surrounding society in ways that are more meaningful.

**Church**

According to the field research, the local Lebanese Baptist Church understood itself as the community of believers. Its reason for existence is mostly within itself. Its *being* is more recognized than its *doing*. The Church does not necessarily exist to *do* something, to be on a mission. The Church's *doing* is mostly secondary and incidental to its *being*. The Church's recognized functions and purposes are primarily internal. The world outside the Church is not always present in the consciousness of the Church. Neither is the Kingdom of God. The concept is there, theologically, but not present in the awareness and consciousness of the Church as ministries are planned. The notion of the Church as an agent to transform the world is not visible. There are no sufficient structures or frameworks for taking on external ministries. In addition, the churches are structured as organizations, which tend to be inflexible and slow to respond to change. Despite the variations in organizational structures, the churches are all ultimately led by one solo pastor who has the final say. However, leadership at many levels are included in decision-making.

The humanitarian crisis and the way churches responded had a tremendous impact on the churches and their understanding of themselves. The functions and purposes of the Church quickly shifted to include the world outside its walls. Structures became secondary to ministry and flexed enough to allow the launching and sustaining of new external ministries in response to the needs of the surrounding communities. More Church members engaged in ministry and in decision-making. Ministry grew, whether in numbers or in impact.

The recent crises have further transformed the Church's self-understanding. Before the pandemic, churches frequently considered that they are being the Church if they were able to meet on Sunday mornings in their buildings. During the pandemic,

and as a result of lockdowns and distancing measures, many churches did not physically meet on Sunday mornings. The criterion became, if we are streaming our Sunday morning service then we are being the Church. The self-understanding moved from building-centric to sermon-centric. However, the economic crisis, exacerbated by the Beirut blast, caused even further change. For many churches that were serving the victims of the blast, their understanding transformed to considering they are being the Church if their congregations were on the streets of Beirut serving others. This is a remarkable transformation that I expect will shape the way churches view themselves after the end of the pandemic.

The impact of theological education on the understanding of Church is highly evidenced in the research, especially among the students who wrote their own Missional Ecclesiology chapters. Their definition of Church as the body of believers always included the qualification "on mission". The Church is understood as a movement, as a living body, as opposed to a static structure. The external purposes of the Church became foundational to ministry, and the role of the Church was strongly connected with the Kingdom of God acting in the world. The understanding of Church and mission are strongly woven together. The self-assessment also provides evidence that the students' perception of their own understanding of church and culture had matured and grown.

The assessment project among graduates also provides evidence that theological education made a difference in the understanding and application of ministry. The students' evaluation of their own ministry and their own churches became dependent on missional thinking and missional engagement. They were able to identify when they felt or thought that their churches were inwardly focused, resistant to change, and lack missional culture. The need to have multiple touching

points with society became evident. Passion for building relationships and extending the reach of the church community into the neighborhoods grew and flourished. The mission of the Church took a primary place in the consciousness and thinking of the graduates.

In brief, going back to Ziya Meral's classification,[453] it is evident that within the span of only a few years, the churches are rapidly moving from *resignation reaction* and *emigration reaction* to *engagement reaction*. The understanding of church and the motivation for the ministry of the church is quickly changing.

**Growth and Reproduction**

In the initial field research, the interviewees primarily addressed one area of growth, which is the personal spiritual growth of the members. This was accomplished primarily through preaching and teaching and through ministry involvement. Beyond that, not much effort was spent in planning growth and reproduction, and there was a clear absence of assessment and evaluation of growth.

The humanitarian crisis led to reported growth in numbers. The Zahle church saw incredible numbers flooding the church, and witnessed the rise of dozens of discipleship groups. However, the church started to measure its growth in impact and not just numerically. The Zahle church identified the impact on the neighbors; on the refugees themselves, who were deeply divided, bonding together; impact on the church's understanding of mission; and impact on the pastor of the church himself in terms of his own leadership.

[453] Meral, "Change and the Church."

The Hadath church also experienced large growth, in numbers as well as in impact. At the time of the publication of Kashouh's book, the number of regular attendees at the regular meetings had grown to 1,300, across three campuses.[454]

Before the recent crises, the churches' growth was mostly felt inside the churches. The main mode of ministry was still invitational. As the churches opened up their doors to serve others, the growth was felt by more coming in. As a result of the recent crises, and with the inability of churches to invite in while their physical doors are closed, growth was felt in serving outside the four walls of the Church.

Theological education seems to have an effect on the understanding of growth and reproduction as well. Although the papers written in the Missional Ecclesiology course did not directly address this area, it is evident that many students have started to regard the church as an organic being where the health of the community stems from the health of the members.

The student self-assessment shows a significant improvement in the students' understanding of the psychological and spiritual processes that lead to personal and corporate growth, and steady improvement in the students' competencies in the areas of church planting and church growth.

The assessment project did not reveal significant change in thinking and practice in the category of growth and reproduction.

Even after the impact of the significant societal crises, the issue of measurement still seems to be absent from the mainstream thinking of the churches and the leaders. What is expressed in this area is insignificant, not enough to draw solid conclusions.

[454] Kashouh, *Following Jesus in Turbulent Times*, 216.

**Leadership**

The humanitarian crisis had a big impact on the leadership practices among the churches involved in serving refugees. The church in Zahle provides a prime example. The enormous change in the responsibility of ministry in the churches working with refugees compelled the pastors to move away much quicker from the solo-leader model. It is humanly impossible to take on that much more ministry without widening the base. The pastor of Zahle church indicated that the crisis changed his understanding of leadership and strengthened his delegation and empowerment. He no longer had to be personally involved in every decision taken. His role shifted from a player to that of a coach.[455] Similarly, the pastor of Hadath church experienced and expressed how critical leadership is to congregational change.

The recent crises added another dimension to leadership. New ministries on the streets needed new skills. The scope of ministry increased, and the mode of ministry changed. New leaders were needed to lead in the areas of fighting poverty, trauma counseling, networking to find jobs and homes, supervising home repairs, and many other skills that became valuable for the Church's response. This is a big departure from the traditional thinking about ministry training for a church context.

The outcome of theological education reveals the changing thinking and practice in those exposed to it. The Missional Ecclesiology course revealed that the majority of the students researched described the preferred leadership style as plurality of leaders using their various spiritual gifts to allow for more distribution of decision-making and power in the church. Leaders lead according to their gifts, and the distinction between clergy and laity should disappear.

[455] Haddad, interview.

The self-assessment of students revealed that their perception of their own leadership competencies improved during their studies. The assessment project revealed that it became important for the graduates to train others to become leaders. Equipping leaders became a priority. Creating a horizontal/flat leadership was identified by one of the graduates as something important for them to accomplish in their churches. One of the focus groups identified *training leaders* as a key function of the church. The thinking about training of leaders has moved from being incidental, informal, and random, to a key function in the church that warrants intentional and formal equipping.

**Proclamation and Discipleship**

The effects of the cultural crises are felt immensely in this category. The understanding of gospel matured. The humanitarian crisis taught the churches that proclaiming the gospel is done in both word and deed. The churches discovered that there are multiple dimensions to proclamation. In addition to verbal proclamation, they learned to demonstrate unconditional love. They learned what integral mission is.[456] This was strongly affirmed by the pastor of the church in Zahle.[457] The churches had to struggle missiologically as well. How do they serve newcomers who do not conform to the prevalent bounded set mentality? This has forced the churches to start moving towards centered set thinking,[458] tolerating new religious forms in their midst as they teach refugees about Jesus.

The recent crises have also expanded the Church's understanding of the Gospel and its proclamation. Serving, feeding, repairing, and counselling, for example, are now viewed as genuine means of proclaiming the Gospel.

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[456] Das, personal communication with author, 26 August 2014.
[457] Haddad, interview.
[458] Bounded sets and centered sets are explained later on page 273.

The effects are highly felt in this category as a result of theological education as well. The Missional Ecclesiology course assignments demonstrated a new understanding of gospel among the students. They all identified a social component of the gospel. The need for discipleship in the church was identified as well, although there was no discussion on the means of discipleship.

In the self-assessment process, students were able to identify that their understanding of nurture and discipleship has improved during the years of study.

The assessment project strongly revealed an understanding and a longing for a *missional* ministry: "becoming more missional," "desire to become missional," "creating missional structure," "lack of missional thinking," and "training missional leaders" are only a few examples. This was widespread among the graduates. This language was unknown to the students before they underwent their theological education and leadership formation. The word *missional* in English is a translation of an Arabic word that literally translates as *sent out*. The graduates have a new understanding of *sent-outness*, of a gospel being proclaimed outside the four walls of the church in new and innovative ways. Additionally, the need to equip leaders who think missionally was strongly identified. Naturally, the means of this equipping did not come up.

**Role of the Holy Spirit**

The Hadath church recognized the role that the Holy Spirit played in the change that took place in the church. This was mainly through the Holy Spirit growing the fruit of the Spirit among members, and the church cultivating it.

The role of the Holy Spirit was also strongly discerned during the recent crises in how God used the calamities to open up new avenues for ministry. The calamities revealed the sinfulness and brokenness of the world, and the Church's response

revealed God's restorative power working through the churches in the midst of suffering.

The impact of theological education, however, highlights the role of the spiritual gifts. It is evident from the Missional Ecclesiology assignment that the theological students researched highlighted the leadership of the Holy Spirit and His role through the spiritual gifting of the believers.

The self-assessment tool revealed that students perceive that they are growing from year to year in the understanding of the spiritual processes by which people grow.

None of the results or outcomes of the assessment project mention the Holy Spirit or spiritual gifts. There is mention of the need to learn more about spiritual formation and spiritual warfare, but no direct mention of the Holy Spirit. This whole area was strikingly lacking in the results of the assessment.

My conclusion is that the understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit and how He functions and leads is still vague. The Holy Spirit is in the background as a passive empowering agent rather than an active participant.

**Ethics**

The impact of the humanitarian crisis on this category is highly evidenced. First, the high numbers of Muslim refugee newcomers came into the churches looking differently, dressing differently, and behaving differently. This did not cause a reaction in the churches. Although their struggles as they opened up to strangers were apparent, they did not judge the newcomers based on appearance. The newcomers started to come to faith and become insiders, yet the churches did not consider the way people looked as an important distinguishing factor in what characterizes a believer. Second, the churches were able to identify that they had a 'love' problem

that needed to be addressed. Loving 'the other' and reaching out to them became an important distinguishing factor that characterized the members. Third, the churches suddenly became very aware of their need to reach their surrounding societies and neighborhoods. They did everything they could to win over their neighbors instead of staying aloof or alienating them.

The recent crises produced two major shifts. First, the ministry of the churches in the streets of Beirut became religiously blind, meaning that church members served the needy regardless of their religious affiliation or political affiliation. The members reached the point where they can see the humanity of the people in need rather than placing them in traditional categories. The second shift is in the intensity of the work of the churches within their communities. The work of the Church within the surrounding society became inseparable from the role of the Church.

Theological education evidenced the same impact in this category. Students of the Missional Ecclesiology course were quick to identify the distinguishing characteristics for believers as primarily love and unity. In addition, they were able to make the connection between their churches and their surrounding communities. It became very important for them that their churches engage their communities and exercise their prophetic voices. The need to contextualize the ministries of the churches to become more relevant became very important.

The self-assessment revealed a very clear improvement in the students' self-perception of their abilities to understand their culture and engage it in meaningful ways.

Similarly, the assessment project revealed the graduates' deep desire for their churches to become more effective in addressing the needs of their wider communities as they transformed into being more missional. This can be strongly

detected across all the regions that were researched. The need for strong connection between the church and surrounding societies is clearly identified and recognized.

## *Conclusion*

It is evident from the research that the proactive developments in theological education and the reactive responses to significant events in the country have had a major impact in changing the understanding and practice of ministry in the researched categories. It is also interesting to note that the two – the proactive and reactive responses, are not necessarily independent. There is a high probability that the two variables have influenced one another. J. Andrew Kirk notes that "the relationship between theory and practice is never uniformly in one direction: practice is always informed by theoretical commitments and theory is always influenced and tempered by practical experience."[459] Kirk argues that "it is now much more universally recognized that the search for knowledge and understanding is context-dependent."[460] He promotes the concept of starting with practice then moving on to theological reflection. This has been precisely our experience at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, where the humanitarian crisis that forced a change in praxis among the churches motivated a rethinking and reshaping of the theological curriculum. The curriculum, in return, shaped the thinking of the practitioners who were trained in it. The two influences, one proactive and one reactive, proved to be inseparable at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary.

In this chapter, I have presented two sets of data: First, field research from interviews, church document analysis and observations, and, second, case studies of

[459] J. Andrew Kirk, "Re-Envisioning the Theological Curriculum as If the *Missio Dei* Mattered," *Common Ground Journal: Perspectives on the Church in the 21st Century* 3, no. 1 (2005): 23-24.

[460] Ibid., 32.

my Canadian experience, of theological education and of the Lebanese Baptist churches response to times of crises. In the next chapter, I present a detailed overview of the Missional Church movement and literature in order that, in Chapter Five, I can reflect on the changes in the Lebanese Baptist churches in light of it and, based on it, to articulate a contextual theology of and for the Lebanese Baptist churches and to cultivate a way forward.

# Chapter Four: The Missional Church

In this chapter, I present a detailed overview of the Missional Church movement, then I present the scope of the movement's literature as well as additional literature that I find helpful. I do so for the purpose of developing a theological tool that I can use to reflect on the changes in the Lebanese Baptist churches in light of it and informed by it. My intention is to prepare the ground for a contextual theology of and for the Lebanese Baptist churches and to cultivate a way forward.

I start this chapter by investigating the origins of this movement, answering the questions: Where did it come from? And what instigated it? Then, I move on to defining the current trends and ideas that are prevalent and relevant to this study's consideration of the changes in the Lebanese Baptist churches. I want to answer the questions: Is this just a fad? Is this model delivering on its promises to the churches that have adopted it, even in its own context in North America? Then, finally, I provide the reasoning for bringing this model into a conversation with the Lebanese Baptist churches by answering the question: Why have I jumped on this "band wagon"?

## *The Origins of the Missional Church Movement and Literature*

Many churches in the West have been concerned about the cultural changes that were taking place in the society, and the impact of these changes on the ministry of the church. The Gospel and our Culture Network summarizes these concerns into three categories:[461] First, the emerging cultural trends and ethnic traditions that are impacting Western societies and shaping life in North America. Second, the rapid

[461] GOCN, "About the Network..." https://gocn.org/about-us/what-and-why/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

changes taking place as society is moving from "modernity" to "postmodernity". And third, the experience of dislocation as the church finds itself removed from the center and the place of importance in society. As these churches were seeking to revitalize their ministries in response to the cultural changes, they found a strong foundation in the teachings and writings of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin.

Francis Fulling Blomberg argues[462] that Newbigin was a good fit as a foundation for a new thinking because "he was able to articulate the need for a missionary approach to the traditionally 'Christian' nations of the West." He "recognized the need for continuity with the biblical tradition and had well-grounded theological justification," and his recommendations for ecclesiological changes were based on an "epistemology consistent with a biblical worldview."

**Newbigin's Influence**

Newbigin spent most of his adult life as a British missionary to India. The England that he left as a young man was a "Christian" England. Newbigin went to India to be involved in cross-cultural mission work. This was what the imperial missionary enterprise did then, a Christian Western country sending missionaries to a non-Christian non-Western country to be colonized for Christ. Beaver observes that "all missions were paternalist and colonialist at the turn of the [twentieth] century."[463]

Newbigin came back to England in 1974 to be shocked by how secular his country had become. "[W]hat had once been a Christendom society was now clearly post-Christian, and in many ways, anti-Christian."[464] Newbigin became concerned in

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[462] Francis Fulling Blomberg, "Forming and Sustaining Christian Community in a Consumer Culture: An Analysis of and Search for Appropriate Models" (Dissertation, Univeristy of Wales via IBTS, 2014), 149.

[463] R. Pierce Beaver, "The History of Mission Strategy," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter et al. (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1999), 249.

[464] Guder's observations in Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Craig van Gelder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

how his country could be won back for Christ. The central question that he tried to answer in his book *Foolishness to the Greeks* was: "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?"[465] Newbigin's other writings during that period that addressed these same concerns include *The Other Side of 1984* and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.[466]

Newbigin's foundational contribution to the missional church conversation was his development of a theology of cultural plurality, although Newbigin himself never stated it explicitly as such. His primary concern was the mission of the church in a culturally pluralistic world, so his writings reflected that. According to George R. Hunsberger,[467] Newbigin was specifically suited to start this theological discussion, for three reasons. First, Newbigin had a strong understanding of cross-cultural mission due to his long tenure in India, and his writings reflect that. Second, he also had a strong understanding of church unity. Newbigin was heavily involved in ecumenical discussions that began then as "an intracultural discussion in the Western church."[468] Cultural plurality presented a challenge to the unity of the church, and this was one of the main agendas for Newbigin's writings. The third reason is his understanding of religious pluralism, again due to his time of service in India. This religious pluralism had moved into every "Western neighborhood"[469] due to the migration of people of many faiths to the West.

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[465] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

[466] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, The Risk Book Series (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989).

[467] George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 25-33.

[468] Ibid., 27.

[469] Ibid., 29.

Newbigin's strength was that he responded theologically to all these challenges. Hunsberger summarizes Newbigin's approach into two fundamental presuppositions: that "issues of missionary approach regarding human cultures are and must be theological", and that "issues of a theological approach to human cultures must account for and respond to the inherent plurality of those multiple cultures."[470]

Newbigin ended up developing a solid *missionary ecclesiology*, which became a precursor for others to build on and develop what became labeled as *missional ecclesiology*. Newbigin's ecclesiology developed from a Christendom ecclesiology to a missionary ecclesiology because of his experience as a missionary, his significant work within the ecumenical movement, and his call for a missionary encounter with the Western culture.[471]

**Since Newbigin**

Newbigin's writings in the early nineteen eighties inspired the emergence of a movement in England that became known as the Gospel and Our Culture (GOC) conversation.[472] Newbigin provided intellectual leadership to this movement. He was joined by many other scholars and church leaders. This movement did not last long in England and declined especially after the death of Newbigin. However, a North American counterpart emerged in the late nineteen eighties under the leadership of George Hunsberger. This American counterpart became known as the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN).[473] It attracted many scholars and started in the early 1990s publishing articles and convening annual consultations. The William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company,[474] in partnership with the Network, began publishing books

[470] Ibid., 7.

[471] Michael W. Goheen, "'As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You': J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology" (Dissertation, Universiteit Utrecht, 2000).

[472] van Gelder, ed. *The Missional Church in Context*, 3-4.

[473] See http://www.gocn.org.

[474] See http://www.eerdmans.com.

under the series *The Gospel and Our Culture Series*.[475] This was followed by a newer series called *The Missional Church Series*[476] that started in 2005 to publish content from what was expected to become an annual Missional Church Consultation.[477]

These conversations expanded on Newbigin's missionary ecclesiology, although with some differences.[478] Mission is no longer an activity of the church. Mission is the result of God's initiative. The church is no longer the purpose or goal of the gospel but its instrument and witness. The church should no longer be a church with mission but a missional church.[479] These are some of the ecclesiological concepts that started to change as a result of this movement.

**Other Influencers**

No human thought develops in isolation. Newbigin's theories did not come out of nothing. He must have been influenced by others. Karl Barth, for example, was among the first theologians to describe mission as an activity of God himself. David Bosch notes the following on the Barthian influence: "The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world."[480] Even though the term "missional" had not been coined yet, Barth's understanding of church is missional as he describes the mission of the church as not secondary to its being but exists in its sent-ness and

[475] See "The Gospel and Our Culture Series", The Gospel and Our Culture Network https://gocn.org/book-series/ (accessed 30 October 2020).

[476] "Missional Church Series", W.B. Eerdmans https://www.eerdmans.com/Products/CategoryCenter.aspx?CategoryId=SE!MCS (accessed 30 October 2020).

[477] van Gelder, ed. *The Missional Church in Context*, 5.

[478] A thorough analysis of these differences are discussed in Goheen, "'As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You': J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology", 435-440.

[479] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*.

[480] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 390. Emphasis in original.

for the sake of its being.[481] In his autobiography, Newbigin mentions that he read the whole of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*[482] and "it was an immensely rewarding experience"[483] for him. In this chapter, however, I will focus on the influence that started with Newbigin and took shape mainly within the Gospel and Our Culture Network.

## *Other Trends and Ideas*

The Gospel and our Culture Network and the ensuing *missional church* conversation were not the only attempts taking place at the turn of the third millennium to redefine the ministry of the church, in both theology and practice. Many other conversations and movements began during that period. One such movement was the *Emerging Church Movement*. James S. Bielo conducted a study on this movement in North America. He asserts that this is a broad label, created by insiders in this movement. It marks "a dual assumption: that contemporary Evangelicalism is undergoing profound change, and that the Christian church always has and always will be changing."[484] This is a movement of "cultural critique." Bielo studied how this movement answers the cultural challenges facing the church and how the churches are responding.

"The influence of the Gospel and Our Culture Network reaches to Australia, where Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch – who are influential voices within the Emerging Church Movement – wrote an influential book" that extended the Missional

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[481] Darrell L. Guder, "From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (2003): 46.

[482] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh,: T. & T. Clark, 1936).

[483] Lesslie Newbigin, *Unfinished Agenda: An Autobiography* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 241.

[484] James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 5.

Church conversation, remarks Robert Doornenbal.[485] Although there is a difference between the two movements, there is a connection between the vocabulary and intentions of the Missional Church Movement on the one hand and those of the Emerging Church Movement on the other," notes Doornenbal.[486]

Even the very term *missional* became widely used and the intended meaning behind it extended beyond the initial understanding and scope of the Gospel and Our Culture Network literature. Prebble argues that "among the avalanche of literature and resources that have been produced reflecting on 'missional' themes, many writers are using 'missional church' as though it were yet another program for organizing and renewing local churches."[487] Prebble concludes that the term is used to refer to the church's organizational sense more than a theological concept.

## *Missional Church Definition*

For this research, I will limit the scope of what a *missional church* is to the initial understanding by the Gospel and Our Culture Network. A useful definition is provided by Guder: "We have arrived at a shared consensus that our definitions of the church should focus on and arise out of the formation of particular communities of God's people, called and sent where they are as witnesses to the gospel."[488]

The Gospel and our Culture Network articulated their understanding by providing twelve key indicators to what they thought identified a missional church.[489] The Network identified the indicators, explained them, and provided a description of

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[485] Robert Doornenbal, *Crossroads: An Exploration of the Emerging-Missional Conversation with as Special Focus on 'Missional Leadership' and Its Challenges for Theological Education* (The Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publisher, 2012), 5.

[486] Ibid.

[487] Edward Prebble, "Missional Church: More a Theological (Re)Discovery, Less a Strategy for Parish Development," *Colloquium* 46, no. 2 (2014): 238.

[488] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 9.

[489] GOCN, "Empirical Indicators of a 'Missional Church'," *GOCN Newsletter* 10, no. 3 (1998). https://gocn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/103-newsletter_0.pdf (accessed 30 October 2020).

what it looks like. I will list the indicators here. The explanation and what they look like are provided in Appendix 10:[490]

1. The missional church proclaims the Gospel.
2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.
3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.
4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.
5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all its members.
6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.
7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.
8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.
9. The church practices hospitality.
10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.
11. This community has a vital public witness.
12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

## *Missional Church Literature*

Although at the core of the original missional church movement are questions first asked and wrestled with by British Lesslie Newbigin, I am focusing my literature research on those contributions, mainly in North America, that started using the term *missional* when there was still a common understanding of what that term refers to.

[490] Refer to page 364.

Major North American contributors are authors like Craig van Gelder, Darrell Guder, Ed Stetzer, Alan Roxburgh, Reggie McNeal, Robert Banks, George Hunsberger, Lois Barrett, Charles Edward van Engen and others. I also include in this survey some material that was written in the late 1990s and that was planting the seed for the missional perspective although they had not used the term *missional* themselves. In addition, I include some contributors from outside North America, such as Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch that have extended the missional church conversation in a different context.

The indicators presented above set the scope and criteria for the literature with which this research engages. The body of literature that had enough commonality in understanding of missional community, missional ministry, and missional leadership, is what I am interested in. Alignment with the empirical indicators listed above became the deciding factor in whether the resources are used for this research or not.

There have been a few attempts to map the missional literature. Stetzer developed a visual mapping breaking down the literature into three categories: Missional Communities, Missional Leaders, and Missional Disciples.[491] Craig van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, on the other hand, do an extensive mapping of the literature based on a hermeneutic that they developed.[492] This work is immensely helpful for tracing how the missional perspective has developed. Van Gelder and Zscheile comment on the diversity of the original writing team of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, even though they were entirely white Protestants. They included

[491] Ed Stetzer, "Missional Family Tree," *Christianity Today* (2009). http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/february/missional-family-tree.html (accessed 30 October 2020).

[492] Craig van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011).

men and women, ordained and academics, Presbyterian/Reformed, United Methodist, Mennonite, and a Canadian Baptist.[493]

In this research, I consider all the literature that fits the scope above and that speaks to the seven aspects of the church that formed my field research. The authors are either core to the Gospel and Our Culture Network or have extended the conversation, as identified by van Gelder and Zscheile's mapping.

For the purpose of clarity, I will be referring to the body of literature used in this research as the *missional church conversation*. When I use the term *Missional Conversation* in my analysis below, I am referring to the understanding that emerges from the literature that I included in this missional church conversation.

## *The Question of Relevance*

Despite the wide variance in contextual challenges between North America and the Middle East, there is a lot of commonality in the questions of relevance that are being asked of the churches and by the churches. As described earlier, I grew up in a Baptist church context in Lebanon, and I repeatedly wrestled with the relevance of our church ministry in our context. Then, after immigrating to Canada, I became a member and leader in an Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern church. That immigrant church in the context of the Toronto metropolitan area, serving new immigrants from a diverse Middle East, as well as serving second-generation immigrants who are more Canadian in their culture than Middle Eastern, wrestled with the same questions of relevance.

My first exposure to the missional church concept was during my studies at Tyndale Seminary while I was active in both the workplace and church life. I found

[493] Ibid., 48.

the concepts offered both inspiring and compelling. The missional perspective was compelling to me because it addressed the relevance question. This is what makes it compelling in other contexts as well. What renders the conversation cross-cultural is not in how the questions are answered in a Western context. Rather, what makes it cross-cultural is in asking the right questions. The answers can justifiably be very different in dissimilar contexts. The questions, however, can be as relevant and potent in the Middle East as they are for North America. The desire for church ministry to be effective and relevant, no matter how that is defined, is cross-cultural.

In addition to the benefit of raising the right questions, there can be immense value in understanding and appreciating how these questions are being answered in each context. The plan is not to import Western ideas into a Middle Eastern or specifically Lebanese setting. That has been done before, with varying degrees of success. Rather, the value can be in considering Western challenges to the Western paradigm that was already imported to the Middle East by missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition to that, every culture is prone to become ethnocentric.[494] Viewing our own culture through the eyes of an external culture has the potential of addressing our own blind spots.

As was presented in the previous chapter, the question of relevance is also answered by considering my own lived experience. My time in Canada at the Middle East Baptist Church and at Tyndale Seminary introduced me to lived questions and studied questions regarding the mission of the church. Upon my return to Lebanon in 2005 and through my field research (2005 to 2011), I experienced a congruence between that which had become important to me in Canada with that which was

[494] Hiebert explains ethnocentrism as follows: “We all see our own cultures as positive because we understand and appreciate them, and they are ours. We tend to prejudge other cultures using the criteria for our judgments the standards of our culture rather than those of the Bible.” Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *Missiology* 12, no. 3 (1984): 288.

becoming important to the Lebanese Baptist churches. I consider my time in Canada as preparation for the leadership with which I have been entrusted at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, and that preparation revolved around my learning about the Missional Church movement and literature. It is for these reasons that I consider the North American missional perspectives profitable to the Lebanese Baptist churches' journey to fulfilling its full missional mandate.

## *A Missional Understanding of the Seven Categories*

In this section, I present a detailed overview of a Missional Church perspective as articulated through the body of literature selected for this research by considering the same questions that I prepared for the field research organized in the same seven categories: mission, church, growth and reproduction, leadership, proclamation and discipleship, the role of the Holy Spirit, and ethics. The form and wording of the questions differ slightly. For example, a question asked in the field research, such as: "What do you understand by 'mission'?", the same question when asked of the literature becomes: "What does the missional conversation understand by 'mission'?" Therefore, in the literature survey below, my aim is to find out how a body of missional church literature, what I am referring to as a *Missional Church Conversation*, answers the same questions asked of my field research participants. There is some obvious overlap between the different categories, but what follows is a representative summary of the answers provided by the missional conversation.

## Mission

### *What is understood by mission?*

The Missional Conversation answers this question in two main clusters: mission as the nature of the church, not a function; and mission as a function, as theme, as purpose, or as witness of the church.

For the mission as nature view, van Gelder presents an understanding that shifts mission "from naming a *function* of the church to describing its essential *nature*."[495] According to van Gelder, "mission is no longer understood primarily in functional terms as something the church *does*." He continues: "Rather it is understood in terms of something the church *is*, as something that is related to its nature."[496] Milfred Minatrea states it in a similar fashion: "Missional churches perceive missions not as a program of the church, but as the essence of the church."[497] Van Engen not only derives the meaning of mission from the nature of the church, but also takes it in both directions: "We cannot understand mission without viewing the nature of the Church, and we cannot understand the Church without looking at its mission."[498]

Representing the functional view of mission, Guder describes mission as the result of God's initiative and is rooted in his purposes. "'Mission' means 'sending,' and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human

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[495] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 31. Emphases in original.

[496] Craig van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 85-86. Emphasis in original.

[497] Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 145.

[498] Charles Edward van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 30.

history."[499] Guder goes on to describe mission as being derived from the very nature of God.[500] He portrays mission as a movement by quoting Bosch:

> The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.[501]

Stetzer also describes mission in functional terms: "The concept of *missio Dei,* the mission of God, is recognition that God is a sending God, and the church is sent. It is the most important mission in the Scriptures."[502] Stetzer, inspired by missiologist Wilbert Shenk, attributes to the church the role of agency. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the mission, the Holy Spirit its power, the church its instrument, and the culture its context.[503]

Guder as well describes mission with the functional term *witness*. According to Guder, mission is witness, and witness "serves as an overarching term drawing together proclamation *(kerygma),* community *(koinonia),* and service *(diakonia).*" He considers these as "essential dimensions of the Spirit-enabled witness for which the Christian church is called and sent."[504] Guder takes this further. If mission is to be understood as witness, then a proper missiologically-informed theology of evangelism will have to include the emphases of witness as theocentric, Christocentric, pneumatological, historical, eschatological, ecclesiological, multicultural and ecumenical.[505]

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[499] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 4.
[500] Ibid., 5.
[501] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390 as cited in Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 5. Emphasis in original.
[502] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 28. Emphasis in original.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, ed. Craig van Gelder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 53. Emphasis in original.
[505] Ibid., 61-70.

Others have used statements of purpose to define mission, such as: the mission of the church is to live redemptively,[506] or "God sends Jesus and the church shares in Jesus' being sent, Jesus' mission."[507] Stephen B. Bevans argues for mission that is counter-cultural by nature and that recognizes the importance of the context in which it lives.[508] Michael Frost simply defines mission as "an expression of Christian worship."[509]

Daniel R. Anderson, in his analysis, is able to combine the two views together, mission as nature and mission as function. He brings the functional view from Western Christianity's understanding of Trinity, and the view of nature from Eastern Christianity's understanding of Trinity. He puts it this way: "While the Western understanding of Trinity provides DNA for the sending of the church in mission, the Eastern understanding of Trinity provides DNA for the nature of that sending."[510] Anderson elaborates on the Eastern understanding of Trinity that focuses on the relational, perichoretic intersubjectivity[511] of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

John F. Hoffmeyer ventures an interesting hypothesis on missions, arguing that the "Western theological tradition is long on Christology and short on

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[506] Dan Devadatta, "Strangers but Not Strange: A New Mission Situation for the Church (1 Peter 1:1-2 and 17-25)," in *Confident Witness - Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, ed. Craig van Gelder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 119.

[507] A. Wayne Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries: An Extraordinary Calling for Ordinary People* (Essex, N.Y.: Member Mission Press, 2002), 105.

[508] Stephen B. Bevans, "Living between Gospel and Context: Models for a Missional Church in North America," in *Confident Witness - Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, ed. Craig van Gelder, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 151.

[509] Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 126.

[510] Daniel R. Anderson, "Missional DNA of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," in *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity*, ed. Craig van Gelder, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 168.

[511] According to Anderson, perichoresis is interpenetration among the Trinity, describing the communal nature of God. Intersubjectivity is how the persons of the Trinity relate to one another, subject to subject rather than subject to object. Ibid., 168-169.

pneumatology."[512] He believes that instead of thinking of the mission of God, the church needs to think of the missions of God. Hoffmeyer explains: "It seems to me that one of the most important next steps in conceiving a missional church on the basis of the missional triune is to focus more on the differentiation between the mission of the Word and the mission of the Spirit."[513] Hoffmeyer thinks that "this is a differentiation not at the expense of unity, but in the service of unity."

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation, in its understanding of *mission*, combines both views, *mission* as the nature of the church and *mission* as a function of the church, albeit a principal function. The two different views appear to present a dichotomy, but they are complementary at the core. There is convergence in the outcome. For the churches that view *sent-out*ness as the essence of the church, missional activity will result by default, and for the churches that view mission as a function of the church, this function is always described as a necessary purpose for the church and not optional. There is agreement among the literature that *church* and *mission* are inseparable. The church is *sent*, and has a crucial mission in the world. This is also supported by the view that the church acts as an *agent*.

#### *Who does mission?*

There is consensus within the Missional Conversation that the work of mission is the work of every Christian since mission is "inherent within the very nature of the church."[514] Minatrea sums it up in a clear way: "every believer is to bear witness, is sent to evidence the veracity of the Gospel message, every believer is on mission."[515]

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[512] John F. Hoffmeyer, "The Missional Trinity," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 2 (2001): 110.
[513] Ibid., 111.
[514] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 30.
[515] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 80.

He adds: "Missionaries are ones who are sent, and for the New Testament church that includes every believer. All disciples are to live apostolically."[516] A. Wayne Schwab, in describing the spheres of influence where mission is to take place, calls it the "mission of each Christian."[517] Derek Christensen stresses how fundamental it is to see "the 'lay' segment of the church involved in the *missio Dei* as the default mode of the church's operation."[518]

### Analysis

There is agreement among the literature that the role of mission belongs to every member of the church. This aligns well with how the churches viewed mission as at the very core of the church, inseparable from it, and how the church is sent into the world.

#### *Where is mission done?*

Many authors talk about incarnational living, and how that takes place. In summary, most authors refer to the different spheres of influence that the Christian finds himself or herself in as their place of mission. Minatrea puts it this way: "Missions conform to spheres of influence. This means that missional responsibility begins among those with whom one has the closest relationships."[519] Schwab talks about proclaiming and working, in deed and word, in all the arenas of human life and the creation. These arenas include "our daily work, our homes, our local communities, the wider world (of society, culture, economics, and government), our leisure time, and our faith community."[520] Schwab continues, using the words of Archbishop of Canterbury, George L. Carey:

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[516] Ibid., 81.
[517] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 108.
[518] Derek Christensen, "Marketplace and Missional Church," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 13, no. 1 (2005): 17. Emphasis in original.
[519] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 91.
[520] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 108.

> If we can accept that God has put each of us in a certain place – be it a factory, boardroom, home, college, community, world – then that is the place where we are called to exercise a royal priesthood as Christians in the world.[521]

McNeal talks about a church "in every mall, every Wal-Mart supercenter, every Barnes and Noble."[522] Christensen gives a straight and definite answer: "The obvious answer is that a considerable amount of mission takes place in the marketplace. It is where the people are, where the average person spends the largest single allocation of dedicated time."[523] Frost and Hirsch, summarizing what it means to be an incarnational church, express the same thought in a different way: "the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society to be Christ to those who don't yet know him."[524] Minatrea describes this as being philosophical instead of geographical. Mission is "not defined by the location to which the disciple goes, nor the number of oceans crossed in the process, but rather by the disciple's message demonstrated and declared through an incarnational lifestyle."[525]

### Analysis

There is high alignment within the Missional Conversation about where mission takes place, as incarnational living in the world, taking place in every sphere of influence. Mission takes place primarily in the marketplace. The Missional Conversation understands mission as being holistic, happening everywhere. This understanding is in line with the importance that missional churches put on mission as

[521] Ibid., 110.
[522] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 35.
[523] Christensen, "Marketplace and Missional Church", 13.
[524] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 12.
[525] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 81.

at the core and is in line with the understanding that everyone within the church community is involved in this mission.

### *How is mission done?*

According to the Missional Conversation, mission mostly revolves around the concept of being incarnational, although not all literature uses the *incarnational* language. Guder talks about the church living in the world but not of the world. "The church's particular communities live in the context of the surrounding culture, engage with the culture, but are not controlled by the culture."[526] In order to change the world, mission is accomplished in the following way, according to Minatrea: mission begins with relationships, and is expressed in a *glocal*[527] community. Missional churches identify their primary mission fields, and that is how they get to touch their world.[528] Dan Devadatta introduces the thought of living courageously in the midst of the church's neighbors. "We are to demonstrate that we are living *for* something."[529] Ronald J. Lavin talks about the posture of mission: "missional churches primarily face outward instead of inward."[530] He stresses that missional churches do not accomplish mission simply by offering comfort and hope to individuals at times of personal crisis. Missional churches also "practice social ministry for the poor, the down-and-out, and people caught in the turmoil of natural disasters."[531]

Schwab describes mission as moving through a certain progression for each individual Christian, a movement between words and actions. Schwab reverses the traditional sequence of words then actions. "First, come loving and just actions. Then

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[526] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 114.
[527] A term that Minatrea adopted to combine global with local. Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 93-95.
[528] Ibid., 92.
[529] Devadatta, "Strangers but Not Strange," 117. Emphasis in original.
[530] Ronald J. Lavin, *Witness: The Reign of God and Missional Churches Today* (Lima, Ohio: CSS Pub. Co., 2007), 105.
[531] Ibid., 129-130.

come words that interpret the actions. Finally, when appropriate, come invitations to explore the Christian way."[532] McNeal, describing mission as going where people are already hanging out, talks about being prepared "to have conversations with them about the great love of our lives."[533] The church accomplishes its mission by creating "a culture informed by missiology," and creating "venues where people can practice being missionaries."[534] Christensen suggests how to accomplish that: "Tentmaking is a major strategy for mission involvement in a world of closed borders."[535]

Frost and Hirsch explain what incarnational mission is. First, incarnational mission is the gospel becoming a genuine part of a certain people group. Second, the church identifies with that people group. Third, the church develops a real and abiding presence among that people group. Fourth, incarnational mission uses centrifugal rather than centripetal forces. In other words, the movement takes place away from the center rather than towards the center. Fifth, the people in that group get to experience Jesus from within their own culture.[536]

### Analysis

There is a lot of harmony in how the Missional Conversation thinks that mission should be done. Mission is accomplished as the churches become outward focused, through living in the world, incarnational living, being present. This also falls in line with the churches' understanding of mission, who does it, and where it is done.

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[532] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 107.
[533] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 42.
[534] Ibid., 61.
[535] Christensen, "Marketplace and Missional Church", 13.
[536] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 37-40.

### *Conclusion*

There is high congruity in the literature on the understanding of mission. Mission is the very essence of the church, or at least a primary function of it. The church is an agent of mission. Based on that, every member in the church is understood to be on mission. Every place or circle of influence that members find themselves in becomes their primary place of mission. It follows that mission is accomplished mainly through incarnational living, by being present in the world. The Missional Conversation presents a coherent lens regarding mission.

## Church

### *What is the church?*

The Missional Conversation provides a breadth of definitions and descriptions of a missional church, as varied as there are pieces of literature written about them. Even the same authors define the terms slightly differently when they are dealing with the different aspects of the church. There is a common thread, however, between all of these definitions. They all highlight, to a varying extent, the *being* and the *doing* of the church. I will categorize these definitions according to the areas of focus of each one.

Some authors have as the primary focus the church *being* a community. Van Gelder describes the church as more than a physical structure, programmed events, policy choices, relationship with others, historical denomination, organizational structure, or confessional beliefs. The church is all of these and more. It is a "spiritual territory that occupies earthly terrain." It is "the Spirit of God dwelling in the midst of a people who are created and formed into a unique community." The church is about communities taking on "particular names, structures, and behaviors."[537] James V.

[537] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 14-15.

Brownson sees the church as "that part of the world that responds in faith, hope, and love to the judgment and promise of God for the world."[538] Devadatta describes the church as "the place where people can see and experience the redemptive mission of God for this world."[539] Frost and Hirsch get their definition from the Gospel and Our Culture Network material. They define the missional church as representing "God in the encounter between God and human culture." The missional church "is a community that visibly and effectively participates in God's activity, just as Jesus indicated when he referred to it in metaphorical language as salt, yeast, and light in the world."[540] Nicola Hoggard Creegan defines the church as "that community that testifies to resurrection and renewal and restoration, and therefore gives us hope and allows us to be free."[541]

Other authors focus on the *sent-out*ness of the church. Hunsberger defines the missional church as "a body of people sent on a mission,"[542] while Lavin defines it as "primarily a sending church, primarily facing outward, not inward."[543]

Most of the authors, however, focus equally on the church *being* a community and on its *sent-out*ness. Minatrea defines it as "a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world."[544] Van Gelder says that the church "exists as a community created by the Spirit that is missionary by nature in being called and sent to participate

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[538] James V. Brownson, *Stormfront: The Good News of God*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 91.

[539] Devadatta, "Strangers but Not Strange," 118.

[540] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 7.

[541] Nicola Hoggard Creegan, "Freedom and the Missional Church," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 13, no. 1 (2005): 33.

[542] George R. Hunsberger, "Sizing up the Shape of the Church," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 341.

[543] Lavin, *Witness*, 35.

[544] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, xvi.

in God's mission in the world."[545] Marion Wyvetta Bullock believes that the identity of the church is "always understood through its relationship with God." She adds: "This gift of identity includes being sent into the world to participate in the *missio Dei*… The church's *being-ness* is inextricably tied to its *being sent* into the world."[546] Anderson believes that the church "is composed of the people of God gathered in Word and sacrament and sent in mission."[547] He explains that each congregation "is a community of missional people of God gathered doxologically: that is, they are in communion with God and with one another, and are united in worship and mission."[548]

Some authors stress the fact that the church is an instrument. Ed Stetzer and David Putman point out that the church is "God's instrument to reach the world, and it includes reaching your community. We are to be a missional church by calling, nature, and choice."[549] Similarly, Schwab defines the church as "the visible instrument of the mission of God in Jesus Christ."[550] McNeal believes that the church was not intended to exist for its own sake. "It was and is the chosen instrument of God to expand his kingdom. The church is the bride of Christ. Its union with him is designed for reproduction, the growth of the kingdom."[551] Hirsch defines the missional church as "a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world." He explains: "When the church is in mission, it is the true church. The church itself is not

[545] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 73.

[546] Marion Wyvetta Bullock, "The Challenge of Developing Missional Denominational Agencies and the Implications for Leadership," in *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity*, ed. Craig van Gelder, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 105. Emphasis in original.

[547] Anderson, "Missional DNA of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," 189.

[548] Ibid., 190-191.

[549] Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 31.

[550] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 105.

[551] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 15-16.

only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible."[552]

A few authors stress the dual nature of the church. George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder describe the church this way: "On the one hand, it is an institution created by God that represents the presence and authority of God's reign on earth. On the other hand, it is an organization constructed by humans for the purpose of living out a corporate life and mission."[553] Richard W. Rouse and Craig van Gelder credit the dual nature to the Holy Spirit: "It is the Spirit who creates a congregation as a different kind of community, one that is simultaneously holy and human… The church is the only organization of its kind in the world."[554]

Guder stands out in this area as he describes the church as an alternative being. Guder criticizes H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*,[555] saying that his view looks at the church as "simply a collection of individual Christians" and not as a community.[556] Guder sees the church as a holy nation, as an alternative culture with an alternative allegiance. "[T]he church usually has an alternative vocabulary, an alternative economics, and an alternative understanding of power."[557]

### Analysis

The various definitions of church provided by the Missional Conversation fall into three categories: being, doing, and instrument or agent. The *being* aspect focuses on the church community itself. The *doing* focuses on its *sent*-ness, extending the

[552] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 82.

[553] George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder, eds., *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 285.

[554] Richard W. Rouse and Craig van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 32.

[555] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1st Harper torchbook ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956).

[556] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 115.

[557] Ibid., 120.

*being* into the world. The *agency* aspect focuses on the role of the church in the world. The three categories presented by the literature do not present a conflict. They provide complementary understanding of each other. The three aspects are tightly inter-connected. The church needs to *be* the church in order for it to *do* as an agent in the world.

### *What is (are) the purpose(s) of the church?*

The Missional Conversation is full of descriptions of what the purpose of the church is. Some authors stress a single dimension of the purpose of the church while others try to be more holistic in their description. To explain where the purpose of the church comes from, influenced by Newbigin, van Engen asserts that "the Church's purpose can be derived authentically only from the will of Jesus Christ, its Head; from the Spirit who gives it life; from the Father who has adopted it, and from the Trinitarian mission of God."[558]

Some authors emphasize the identity of the community of God as the primary purpose of the church. According to Rouse and van Gelder, "the *purpose* of a congregation – what it *does* – can only be clearly understood by exploring its *identity* (or its nature or essence) – what a congregation *is*."[559] Hunsberger distinguishes missional congregations not as those having grand programs of success, ambitious activism, or any effort to change the world or win it back. "Simply the humility of being God's servants," contends Hunsberger. "Being a missional church is all about a sense of identity, shared pervasively in a congregation that knows it is caught up into God's intent for the world."[560] Along the same line, Hirsch borrows his statement of

[558] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 87.

[559] Rouse and van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, 34. Emphases in original.

[560] George R. Hunsberger, "Discerning Missional Vocation," in *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, ed. Lois Barrett, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 36.

purpose from as far back as C. S. Lewis: "C. S. Lewis rightly understood that the purpose of the church was to draw people to Christ and make them like Christ."[561]

Several authors emphasize the purpose of the church as instrument or agent. Van Gelder comes to the conclusion that "the church of Jesus Christ is not the purpose or goal of the gospel, but rather its instrument and witness."[562] Christensen agrees: "Church is the agent of *missio Dei,* not the goal."[563] Similarly, Guder finds that the church "as witness does not regard itself as its own purpose, but rather as God's Spirit-empowered means to God's end."[564] Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl agree that the church "is not the kingdom of God by itself but God's agent in the world to usher in the reign of God."[565] Stetzer finds that, unlike most organizations in the world, the church does not exist for its own sake or for the sake of its members. "The church exists because God, in his infinite wisdom and infinite mercy, chose the church as his instrument to make known his manifold wisdom in the world."[566] Likewise, Schwab does not see the purpose of the mission of the church is to bring people into the church. "The end has to be the building up of the world by those baptized in Jesus Christ who live as agents of the reign of God – as missionaries."[567] W. Michael Smith suggests that the church is sent into the world to "serve God's healing, transforming purpose."[568]

Various authors highlight the church as a representation or demonstration of God's work. Guder argues that the church is "called and sent to be the unique

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[561] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 102.
[562] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 105.
[563] Christensen, "Marketplace and Missional Church", 14. Emphasis in original.
[564] Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 67.
[565] Steve Ogne and Tim Roehl, *Transformissional Coaching: Empowering Leaders in a Changing Ministry World* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 13.
[566] Stetzer and Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code*, 44.
[567] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 105.
[568] W. Michael Smith, "Missional Faithfulness: An Expanded Agenda for Theological Field Education," *Encounter* 61, no. 2 (2000): 179.

community of those who live under the reign of God."[569] He adds: "the church represents the reign of God by its deeds as the servant to God's passion for the world's life."[570] Brownson puts it this way: "The church has a purpose: salt is to do its salting and light is to do its illumining… Its reason for being is to communicate and to demonstrate the good news of God's new order."[571] Devadatta articulates the same thought: "The Christian community has been called by God, out of the peoples of the world, to live 'alongside with' the peoples of this world."[572] He continues: "We are called to demonstrate to the world and to our neighbors a kind of life that can only be explained by the supernatural workings of the living God in our midst."[573]

Many others put an emphasis on the proclamation or witnessing purpose of the church. Van Engen says that the church "is called to be proclaiming, reconciling, sanctifying, and unifying."[574] Stetzer says that the church "is here to evangelize the world, grow the body of Christ, and extend his kingdom."[575] Terri Martison Elton talks about a communal, sending God who "calls and sends the church to be a witness to the reign of God, proclaiming and living this good news incarnationally."[576] Lavin talks about a goal: "The goal of the missional church is to provide the context for the Holy Spirit to make disciples."[577] Then he connects this goal to the mission: "the primary mission of the church is to witness to outsiders."[578] Guder elaborates on this:

> Proclamation is inevitable if our being and doing signify anything at all about the presence of God's reign. If in our being the church, the world

[569] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 103.
[570] Ibid., 105.
[571] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 125.
[572] Devadatta, "Strangers but Not Strange," 116.
[573] Ibid., 117.
[574] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 66.
[575] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 92.
[576] Terri Martinson Elton, "Corps of Discovery: A Twenty-First-Century Contextual Missiology for the Denominational Church in the United States," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig van Gelder, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 149.
[577] Lavin, *Witness*, 35.
[578] Ibid., 105.

> *sees* God's reign, and by our doing justice, the world *tastes* its gracious effect, then the call to all on the earth to receive and acknowledge that reign begs to be expressed.[579]

Numerous authors use the language of *participation* in the mission of God or in the reign of God to describe the purpose of the church. Rouse and van Gelder write: "Congregations are called, formed, and sent to participate in God's mission of reconciliation within their local contexts."[580] McNeal states it this way: "The church was created to be the people of God to join him in his redemptive mission in the world."[581] According to van Gelder, "congregations are created by the Spirit and their existence is for the purpose of engaging the world in bringing God's redemptive work in Christ to bear on every dimension of life."[582] Bullock states it this way: "God called the church to participate in God's mission. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the church engages God's mission."[583] For Dwight Zscheile, the mission of the church is the mission of God: "a missional ecclesiology suggests that the mission of the church is fundamentally the *missio Dei*, the triune God's mission to reconcile and renew all creation."[584]

A few authors highlight a more holistic, multi-dimensional view of the purpose of the church. Minatrea mentions four dimensions of missional churches: to love God (worship, obey), to love His mission (serve, share), to love people (embrace, invite), and to lead them to follow (equip, empower).[585] Minatrea then suggests five

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[579] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 107-108. Emphasis in original.

[580] Rouse and van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, 41.

[581] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 15.

[582] Craig van Gelder, "An Ecclesiastical Geno-Project: Unpacking the DNA of Denominations and Denominationalism," in *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity*, ed. Craig van Gelder, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 44.

[583] Bullock, "The Challenge of Developing Missional Denominational Agencies and the Implications for Leadership," 104.

[584] Dwight Zscheile, "A More True "Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society": Toward a Missional Polity for the Episcopal Church," in *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity*, ed. Craig van Gelder, Missional Church Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 148. Emphasis in original.

[585] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 17-20.

strategic goals for the church: to lead people to Jesus daily, to equip people to use their gifts, to pursue and practice the presence of God, to plant reproducing churches, and to facilitate becoming a multicultural congregation.[586] Will Mancini's mandate for the church, on the other hand, is "anchored in the 'sentness' of Jesus Christ, reflected in the Great Commission as the church's sentness into the world." The boundaries of the mission of the church becomes: "making disciples, teaching personal obedience to Jesus as Lord, and taking the message of the gospel to the Nations." [587]

Finally, there is a disagreement between Frost and Hirsch on one side and Stetzer on the other in where the reason for the mission of the church comes from. According to Frost and Hirsch, "Christology determines missiology, and missiology determines ecclesiology. It is absolutely vital that the church gets the order right."[588] Stetzer disagrees with Frost and Hirsch, although he incorrectly attributes their book *The Shaping of Things to Come* to Tim Keller and Allen Thompson.[589] Stetzer finds that it is not enough to have Christology shape missiology and missiology shape ecclesiology. Ecclesiology should not be just an outcome but has to be Biblically based. He suggests several Biblical mandates for the church: a covenant community, a meeting, Biblical leadership, ordinances, and preaching. Ecclesiology should not be a blank slate to draw out of the cultural situation. So, for Stetzer, the issue is not a "slavish adherence to a model but a biblical application of the life and teaching of Christ (Christology), lived out in a certain cultural context (missiology), with a New Testament church (ecclesiology)."[590]

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[586] Ibid., 103.
[587] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 120.
[588] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 16.
[589] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 157.
[590] Ibid.

### Analysis

While the Missional Conversation provides multiple answers to this question, the answers seem to be complementary. One important aspect is the identity of the church, being the body of Christ, with all that this entails. The identity of the church guides its purposes. However, the church's objectives cannot end there. The identity compels it to see itself as an instrument or agent on behalf of the Kingdom in the world. In addition, proclamation is an important purpose as well.

The purposes provided by the Missional Conversation are not conflicting. Rather, the literature provides a rich multi-dimensional understanding of the role of the church that includes internal and external purposes, the external stemming out of the internal, the two being inseparable. These purposes fall in line with the Missional Conversation's understanding of church in its *being*, *doing*, and *agency*.

#### *What does the church do to fulfill its mission?*

Van Gelder describes the church's ministry as flowing naturally out of its nature. "This means that the church does what it is."[591] He depicts the church as always forming (missional) and reforming (confessional).[592] Furthermore, he finds two patterns that are evident in the book of Acts that should inform how the missional church fulfills its mission:

> There is intentional, planned activity that leads to growth – a *strategy* as illustrated in the work of the apostles and Paul's mission team. But there is also the *Spirit's leading* of the church in or through conflict, disruption, interruption, and surprise into new and unanticipated directions that resulted in growth.[593]

Guder explains that since the church is supposed to represent the reign of God and be its community, its servant, and its messenger, it follows that the church should

[591] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 128.
[592] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 54.
[593] Ibid., 61. Emphasis in original.

fulfill its mission the same way Jesus carries out God's mission.[594] Van Engen argues that the church becomes mission "in following the Lord as an apostolic community that is in constant, dynamic movement."[595] The view of Ogne and Roeht is that in order for the church to "represent the kingdom of God and His desire to reconcile the world to Himself,"[596] the church needs to be engaged in the world. Similarly, Stetzer believes that job of the church is "to take the gospel to each community, not hold on to our preferences." That is accomplished by engaging a culture "that is not our own preferred culture."[597]

Brownson argues that the church is sent to "live as salt and light", to "perform the gospel."[598] In order to do that, the members of the church engage in every part of the world's life, "as the church dispersed, not as individuals." Hence, we fulfill the mission of the church as we "wrestle with the powers to discern, make known, and serve the work of the Spirit and the reign of Christ."[599]

Zscheile answers this question from a denominational perspective. He finds that the ministry of the church is accomplished through four primary expressions of the church: "the ministry of the laity in their daily vocations in the world, the ministry of congregations, the ministry of dioceses, and the ministry of the denomination." He adds: "These four levels are interdependent and collaborative, mutually enriching, supporting, and enabling one another to fulfill the larger purpose of mission."[600]

Minatrea believes that missional churches accomplish their mission by knowing their purpose, making sure that their actions are based upon this purpose,

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[594] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 102.
[595] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 78.
[596] Ogne and Roehl, *Transformissional Coaching*, 13.
[597] Stetzer and Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code*, 31.
[598] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 125.
[599] Ibid., 91.
[600] Zscheile, "A More True "Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society"," 149.

they let go of what does not serve the purpose, and they do only what serves this purpose.[601]

Mancini introduces another concept in answering this question. He explains that the church best fulfills its mission when it finds what he calls the *Kingdom Concept*. The Kingdom Concept is the simple "big idea" or niche that the church defines where it can glorify God. This Kingdom Concept can be found at the intersection of three aspects of the individual church that make it unique: the "local predicament", the "collective potential", and the "apostolic esprit." The local predicament describes the unique needs and opportunities where God has placed the church. The collective potential is about the unique resources and capabilities that God brings together in the church. The apostolic esprit is the particular focus that most energizes and animates the church leadership.[602]

### Analysis

Authors of the missional literature phrase their ideas differently about what the church does to fulfill its mission. While there is alignment in the understanding of what the church is and what its purposes are, there is high diversity in understanding what the church does to fulfill its mission. The Missional Conversation is more specific about the identity and purposes of the church but seems to give freedom in the area of what can be done to accomplish these purposes. However, all the answers stem out from and extend the purposes but not contradict them.

#### *How is the church organized?*

There is a high level of agreement within the Missional Conversation that each congregation should have some structure. "Administrative structures facilitate the

[601] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 102-109.
[602] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 85.

actual doing of congregational mission in the world,"[603] affirms van Engen. He stresses the fact that administration is a spiritual activity.[604] Nevertheless, there is no one normative Biblical structure prescribed in Scripture.[605] However, there are principles that can be followed. Therefore, the organization in the congregation should be "contextual and provisional in character."[606]

Van Gelder affirms that each organization "usually exists to carry out some specialized ministry."[607] Nevertheless, he warns that "[d]efining the church organizationally – in terms of its structures – can shift our perspective away from the spiritual reality of the church as a social community."[608] Therefore, van Gelder argues that in organizing itself, the church should be mindful of its dual nature as both holy and human and should structure itself accordingly.[609] He consequently suggests a "Spirit-led congregation in relation to an open systems perspective where biblical and theological foundations are utilized to reflect on the social science insights from organizational theory."[610] This missional approach of open systems considers multiple factors. The context, which is the community or environment. The boundaries, which give the congregation its identity within its community. The feedback, which informs the congregation of the activity of people and resources flowing in as well as ministry flowing out. The purpose or mission, core missional practices, and vision, which are essential for the congregation to discern its reason for existence, what it should be doing, and how the Spirit will lead in the future. Leadership, which needs to be

[603] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 179.
[604] Ibid., 180.
[605] Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1974), 131.
[606] van Gelder, "How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation About the Missional Church in Context," 42.
[607] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 19.
[608] Ibid., 23.
[609] Ibid., 118.
[610] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 140.

visionary in nature. Infrastructure, which should be strategic for accomplishing the mission of the congregation. And the Holy Spirit, who is to be leading and guiding transformation.[611]

Guder agrees that no one form of church existed in the New Testament. "Still, scriptural record makes abundantly clear that the church must have structures."[612] He suggests a theological approach that provides three principles for structuring missional churches: The first principle: "The Scriptures function authoritatively in the formation of the churches' structures." The second principle: "The church's catholicity demands a necessary cultural diversity for its structures." The third principle: "The local particular community is the basic missional structure of the church."[613]

Minatrea[614] and Mancini[615] agree that strategy should determine structure. Lavin points out the tension between the church as organization and the church as a living organism, the body of Christ. "The church as an organization is secondary, always open to reformation. The church as a living organism is primary."[616] Van Engen attributes the church as organism back to Paul: "Paul saw the local church as an organism which should continually grow in the missional expression of its essential nature in the world."[617]

Frost and Hirsch bring the concept of church as movement to this discussion. They explain:

> A movement is a group of people organized for, ideologically motivated by, and committed to a purpose that implements some form of personal or social change; who are actively engaged in the

[611] Ibid., 140-152.
[612] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 224.
[613] Ibid., 222.
[614] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 146.
[615] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 219.
[616] Lavin, *Witness*, 82.
[617] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 47.

> recruitment of others; and whose influence is spreading in opposition to the established order within which it originated.[618]

This has implications on structure, as Frost and Hirsch articulate in a later work: "To remain true, all religious organizations require a form of renewal that requires a return to the original ethos and the power of the founder."[619] This "refounding" spurs a subsequent movement.

### Analysis

One would expect that a movement such as the Missional Church would be against being bogged down by structure. This is not the case. There is general agreement within the Missional Conversation that some structure is needed, but that the church should not be defined organizationally, and there is no one normative structure or church governance model that was prescribed in the Bible. Even the literature that describes the church as a movement does not deny the organizational aspect of that movement.

There is clear distinction among the literature between an organization and organism. The Missional Conversation favors the view that the church is an organism, a living body that is always attuned to the direction given by the Head.

#### *What is the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God?*

According to van Gelder, "[t]he relationship of the concepts of the kingdom of God and the church is at the heart of unraveling many of the problems associated with church life today."[620] The two conceptions of church and the kingdom of God may be distinct, but they are "intimately bound together,"[621] since it is the very calling of the church to be "a real, visible, tangible, capable of being experienced – though not yet

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[618] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 202.
[619] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *Rejesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 77.
[620] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 75.
[621] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 98.

perfected – actualization of the reign of God in the world."[622] Not only that, but according to van Gelder, the very nature of the missional church and "its ministry and organization are formed by the reality, power, and intent of the kingdom of God."[623] This is why a lot has been said about the relationship between the two. The following is only a representation of the answers to this question.

Several authors define the relationship between the two as that of agency or representation. Van Engen describes it this way: "As the missionary people of God, local congregations are branch offices of the kingdom, the principal instrument, anticipatory sign, and primary locus of the coming of the kingdom."[624] Guder articulates it this way: "The church represents the divine reign as its *sign and foretaste*," and "as its *agent and instrument*."[625] He then explains how "[m]issional communities are called to represent the compassion, justice, and peace of the reign of God."[626] Similarly, Hunsberger believes that "it is the church's mission to represent the reign of God."[627] He gives more details:

> In its mission under the reign of God, the church represents it as its community (koinonia), its servant (diakonia), and its messenger (kerygma). In its very life, as well as in its deeds and words, the church provides the locus and occasion for the Holy Spirit's manifestation of God's reign.[628]

Other authors stress the proclamation and witness relationship. Van Gelder says: "The church is to bear witness to God's redemptive reign. The church is to live fully within the active, redemptive, kingdom reign of God in the world as it is led and taught by the Spirit."[629] He also puts it this way: "In being missional by nature, local

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[622] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 111.
[623] van Gelder, "An Ecclesiastical Geno-Project," 44.
[624] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 101.
[625] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 101. Emphases in original.
[626] Ibid., 142.
[627] Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," 15.
[628] Ibid., 16.
[629] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 98.

congregations seek to reach beyond themselves into their local areas to bear witness to the reign of God and to invite others into the community of faith."[630] Guder likens the church to an embassy. "The church publicly announces the reign of God because it is an embassy full of ambassadors of the reign of God."[631] Guder goes on to explain how ambassadors are supposed to engage their hosting country, but their loyalty lies with their sending nation and to their mission. Rouse and van Gelder stress the three dimensions of this proclamation: everyone, everywhere, and everything. The followers of Christ are to take the message of salvation and reconciliation, which is the redemptive reign of God in Christ, to *everyone*, *everywhere*, and bear witness to its truth in relation to *everything*.[632] Barrett, along the same lines, believes that the calling of the missional church is to "witness to the gospel of the in-breaking reign of God", and it "strives to be an instrument, agent, and sign of that reign."[633]

A third group of authors looks at the relationship between church and the Kingdom of God as that of participation. Guder believes that the church "is constituted by those who are entering and receiving the reign of God."[634] Lavin states that "a missional church realizes it is called to be an arroban (a preview) of the kingdom of God."[635] This can be easily accomplished since "we have an open door for churches to be colonies of heaven with members seeking to live out what it means to live under the reign of God."[636] Minatrea explains that missional churches can participate in the Kingdom of God by: seeking to develop Kingdom citizens, seeking

[630] Ibid., 168-169.
[631] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 136.
[632] Rouse and van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, 135.
[633] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 126.
[634] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 99.
[635] Lavin, *Witness*, 95.
[636] Ibid., 44.

to express the Kingdom of God in the world, cooperate and not compete in the Kingdom of God, and battle a common enemy.[637]

Smith, on the other hand, highlights all three aspects of agency, proclamation, and participation. The church serves the reign of God, he argues, by announcing it, by embodying it, and by being its instrument.[638]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation considers its relationship to the Kingdom of God as at the heart of church life. This relationship is three-dimensional, as agency, proclamation, and participation. These three dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite. They complement each other in fulfilling the purposes of the missional church. It is clear, from the literature, that the church and the Kingdom of God are inseparable.

### *Conclusion*

The Missional Conversation is coherent in how it defines the church, in *being* and *doing*. The purposes of the missional church are tightly connected with that, focusing on identity as well as agency. From that coherent foundation, the missional literature becomes more diverse in extending the foundation to purposes and organization. However, the purposes and the organization align with and serve the identity and purposes of the church.

The Missional Conversation finds a strong connection between the Church and the Kingdom of God. The church exists to serve the Kingdom, in agency, proclamation, and participation.

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[637] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 129.
[638] Smith, "Missional Faithfulness", 180.

**Growth and Reproduction**

*How does the church encourage growth and reproduction?*

The answers to this question are fairly varied among the various authors within the Missional Conversation. Stetzer and Putman talk about the church maintaining growth through "keeping core group members and others motivated,"[639] and multiplying the ministry by "parenting new churches."[640] They also explicate theories of growth by shifting from programs to processes, from demographics to discernment, from models to missions, from attractional to incarnational, from uniformity to diversity, from professional to passionate, from seating to sending, from decisions to disciples, from additional to exponential, and from monuments to movements.[641]

According to Minatrea, missional churches focus on teaching to obey rather than to know, on equipping,[642] and on serving and sending and not on numerical growth. "They think first of extension, not enlargement; of releasing members in the power of God's Spirit, not in retaining them."[643] This growth is achieved by nurturing congregational formation, spiritual formation, and missional formation, as stated by Mark Lau Branson,[644] and by providing life coaching for people, as indicated by McNeal.[645]

[639] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 296.
[640] Ibid., 317.
[641] Stetzer and Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code*, 48. Stetzer and Putman dedicate the entire chapter 5 to explain these shifts.
[642] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 53.
[643] Ibid., 112.
[644] Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 2007), 116.
[645] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 77.

Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk believe that "[c]ultivating growth requires formation through habits and practices."[646] They provide three examples of such practices: the first is *daily offices*, or developing a rhythm of life. The second is hospitality, not as a strategy for evangelism but rather a genuine welcoming of strangers. The third practice is learning, the church becoming a learning community.[647]

Van Gelder reflects on how church growth is characterized in the book of Acts. The church grew as much by conflict, disruption, interruption, and surprise as it did by any planned strategy. The key to this growth is that the church submitted to the leading of the Spirit and had to "engage in discernment to interpret what was happening."[648] Thus, according to van Gelder, the church can grow and develop as a direct result of conflict, adverse circumstances, ministry on the margins, intentional strategy, divine intervention, and new insights into gospel and culture.[649] Van Gelder goes on to argue that to ensure congregational faithfulness, effectiveness, and efficiency from a Biblical and theological perspective as well as from an organizational perspective, the congregation needs to clarify its purpose and renegotiate the congregation's vision, restructure a decision-making coalition, build capacity for ministry, commit to continuous improvement, and attend to organizational culture.[650]

Frost and Hirsch give practical steps to what makes a missional church grow: having an organic rather inorganic congregation, finding a person of peace in each community and concentrating the friendship on this one household, multiplying

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[646] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 152.
[647] Ibid., 153-159.
[648] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 59.
[649] Ibid., 158-159.
[650] Ibid., 163-166.

incarnational congregations rather than adding numbers to existing congregations, and building imaginative, godly, Biblical leadership.[651] Frost and Hirsch also discuss what they call *eco-leadership* (derived from the ecosystem) that they believe is essential for congregational growth. This means that each congregation needs to be organic, reproducible, sustainable, and should have bi-vocational support, missional support, and centralized funding.[652]

#### Analysis

The answers to this question are very diverse. The understanding of growth and reproduction vary between internal and external. Internally, growth is in knowledge and obedience. Externally, growth is in missional activities. In both aspects, it is evident that the main emphasis is not numerical. The key component to growth is by submitting to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### *To what extent is it successful?*

I was not able to find anything within the Missional Conversation that provides a meaningful answer to this question.

#### Analysis

The Missional Conversation has not dealt with this question. The literature deals with principles and practices, and some have described real-life journeys of missional transformation of actual congregations. However, the literature did not look at criteria for success, and did not follow up with the congregations' journeys to determine success.

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[651] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 63-66.
[652] Ibid., 210-218.

### *How is it measured?*

Even though I found a lot of homogeneity in answering questions about mission, church, and growth and reproduction, I did not find the same consistency in answering the measurement question. It appears to me that there is no clear consensus yet on how to evaluate what is happening with the missional church. Maybe in a few years this will change. There is one common thread, however, within the Missional Conversation. It is about moving away from numbers, shifting from quantitative to qualitative metrics. At least that is the intent. Schwab explains it this way: "The power of numbers to seduce is very strong… One way out is to learn to seek more missionaries, not more members. Grow the mission, not the church."[653] Although Schwab is trying to move away from numbers by growing the mission instead of the church, there is still the fear of falling in the trap of numbers again by measuring more missionaries instead of more members.

Mancini is more intentional about moving from quantitative to qualitative measurements. He starts his chapter on measurement by quoting Robert Lewis: "The true measures of a church are not 'how many' but 'how loving,' not 'how relevant' but 'how real'."[654] Mancini suggests developing certain marks based on the vision and strategy of the church. These marks help the church discover if it is getting close to meeting its objective or not.[655] Other authors focus on results as well. Van Gelder believes that congregations, as "open system" organizations, are considered effective when they accomplish certain things that are consistent with their purposes.[656]

Several authors emphasize the faithfulness to the calling as the true measurement. Barrett writes: "the congregation is beginning to redefine 'success' and

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[653] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 147.
[654] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 151.
[655] Ibid., 151-163.
[656] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 162-163.

'vitality' in terms of faithfulness to God's calling and sending."[657] Minatrea believes that growth is measured by the capacity to release, not retain, and it has to do with function, not size.[658]

Ogne and Roehl, on the other hand, move away from measuring the outcome. To them, success is measured by the experience, not the result.[659] Earl G. Creps combines both the outcome and experience in his assessment. He suggests a congregation ought to measure its success by developing a scorecard that represents its "missional efficiency" in terms of how the congregation is identifying with Christ, co-laboring with him, and being sent by him.[660] Creps proposes a few assessment questions that the congregation can adopt.

### Analysis

This area is still highly lacking within the Missional Conversation. Not much effort has been spent on documenting markers or criteria for success. There is consistency, however, in the desire to move away from numbers, to shift from quantitative to qualitative metrics for measuring success. This raises an important question. If qualitative metrics give a better idea about the health of a congregation, should they totally replace quantitative metrics? If the book of Acts can be used as a model, it is full of reports on numerical growth.

### *Conclusion*

For the Missional Conversation, growth is a key empirical indicator of a healthy church. Growth and reproduction seem to be intentional and planned in a missional church paradigm but vary rather widely. They cover internal and external

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[657] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 33.
[658] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 111-112.
[659] Ogne and Roehl, *Transformissional Coaching*, 222-223.
[660] Earl G. Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 95-96.

dimensions, growth for members as they become missionaries, and growth in missional incarnational communities. However, there are no clear criteria for success.

**Leadership**

### *Who are the leaders of the church?*

Guder affirms that "leadership gifts will not be found in a single individual."[661] Jeff van Kooten and Lois Barrett highlight the same point. Describing the missional churches that they visited, they note: "Virtually all the congregations we visited had multiple people in authority."[662] Robert J. Banks and Julia Banks extend this line of thinking even further: "If all church members are active, whenever they are contributing they are in effect giving the lead to the others and inviting them to follow. So to some extent everyone is involved in leadership."[663] Branson, in addition to emphasizing plurality, articulates what skills they should have: "Leadership needs to be plural, and it needs to be skilled in the work of interpretive, relational, and implemental perceptions and practices."[664] Elton adds that the characteristic of the leader is to be a missionary. These missionaries are a combination of clergy and laity. They are "professionals as well as novices from various socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds." They are not defined by category but by authenticity.[665] McNeal recommends choosing people who are "future-friendly, Spirit-filled, and passionate about kingdom growth."[666]

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[661] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 214.

[662] Jeff van Kooten and Lois Barrett, "Missional Authority," in *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, ed. Lois Barrett, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 142.

[663] Robert J. Banks and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 38.

[664] Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 118.

[665] Elton, "Corps of Discovery," 152.

[666] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 101.

In addition to plurality, the role of spiritual gifts in the leadership of missional churches is highlighted by most authors. Frost and Hirsch affirm that "Christian leadership operates best as community within community."[667] They point out that movements are led by people who do not necessarily have recognized formal leadership status. "Charismatic is the key."[668] Van Gelder looks back at the New Testament church and comments on how "elders from within each assembly were appointed, usually by mobile personnel."[669] He also reflects on Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 and points out that a number of speaking gifts are used to equip and strengthen the church; "Priority is given to apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastor-teachers."[670] Rouse and van Gelder believe that "a healthy ministry climate is sustained and nurtured in large part by a healthy, Spirit-led staff."[671] They are a "Spirit-led team of elected leaders who are supportive of one another and of the congregation's purpose."[672]

Stetzer looks at different models of leadership. He believes that the pastors and elders model "best fits the biblical teaching on governance."[673] He goes on to identify five indispensable leaders for a newly-planted missional church, a pastor (who may or may not have administrative gifts) and five lay people: worship leader, preschool and children's minister, assimilation coordinator, evangelism networker, and spiritual gifts mobilizer.[674] Stetzer here is somehow falling back into more of a positional leadership model. Minatrea is also specific in identifying a missional leadership team that "comprises church members and leadership already involved in the church's

[667] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 68.
[668] Ibid., 204.
[669] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 183.
[670] Ibid., 182.
[671] Rouse and van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, 84.
[672] Ibid., 86.
[673] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 91.
[674] Ibid., 106-110.

missional task." They include leaders from existing ongoing ministries, mission education leaders, those involved in planning annual or other mission trips, discipleship training or other equipping personnel, a deacon or other well-respected servant leader, an individual involved in worship planning, and a representative of the church financial management and budgeting process.[675]

### Analysis

There is consensus within the Missional Conversation that leadership in the missional church is carried out by more than one person. Roles in leadership are based on gifts, and leadership gifts cannot be found in one individual. Many highlight the primacy of the apostleship gift for missional leadership. The wider base of leadership does not undermine the importance of having strong leadership. The Missional Conversation does not deny the need for positional leadership. Rather, it reinforces the need for the positional leaders to recognize the leadership of the Holy Spirit in utilizing the gifts that are present inside the community.

#### *How are the leaders appointed or how do they emerge?*

George Wieland simply points back to the elders' qualifications in Paul's letter to Titus as the key to selecting leaders, how they behave on a daily basis. If they are married, do they demonstrate faithfulness in that relationship? If they have children, do they have a positive effect on them? Moreover, the most important thing is, are they blameless?[676]

Van Gelder writes about selection based on gifts, skills and character: "the Bible assumes that leaders in the church will be selected based on their gifts and skills

[675] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 146-147.

[676] George Wieland, "Grace Manifest: Missional Church in the Letter to Titus," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 13, no. 1 (2005): 9.

– and character."[677] Mancini suggests, when hiring staff, to find people who get the vision.[678] Zscheile highlights the need to equip those that already have the spiritual gift of leadership.[679] Branson, on the other hand, finds leadership to be more fluid: "Leadership is usually circumstantial, arising in a situation, funded and guided as appropriate."[680]

Guder is more specific in how to form missional leaders. His model includes the following two steps: First, find people with a deep sense of vocation, with a distinctively Christian character, and with an academic and intellectual competency. Second, develop their skills in spiritual and communal formation.[681] This partly answers the next question as well.

Van Gelder puts the responsibility of selecting new leaders on the existing leadership:

> As a congregation comes to increased clarity regarding its purpose and its vision of how to participate in God's mission in its context, it is critical that those providing leadership take care to structure processes and procedures for the selection or election of persons for leadership who understand and support that purpose and vision.[682]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation does not explicitly address this question. Although a lot has been written about missional leadership and leadership of missional congregations, most of the literature deals with what leaders look like, what their characteristics are, and how to lead. Not much is written, however, on how congregations appoint leaders or how leaders emerge from within. There is reference,

[677] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 181.
[678] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 218.
[679] Zscheile, "A More True "Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society"," 156.
[680] Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 123.
[681] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 212-214.
[682] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 163-164.

nevertheless, to qualifications and giftedness as the criteria for leadership, and to the responsibility of leaders to prepare future leaders.

### *How does the church equip new leaders?*

Equipping leaders is such a necessity, according to van Engen: "For missionary churches to emerge through the life and ministry of the people of God in the world, the training of congregational leaders of all types and at all levels is not an option."[683] The major common thread among the literature in answering the question of "how" is the notion of apprenticeship, although I did not notice this term being used anywhere. Van Gelder sees the calling of leaders as a social process. "Other leaders identify, recruit, train, and test those who might serve as additional leaders… The whole community confirms those who have been selected."[684] Roxburgh and Romanuk frame this apprenticeship within a community of learners: "a leader develops skills… by becoming part of a group of leaders willing to take this journey of learning these skills for themselves and holding each other accountable."[685] Leadership development, according to Mancini, is not just about giving them more "Maxwellisms",[686] but about developing their appreciation, understanding, and skills. "They become the trainer-coaches who take the DNA to the edges of the movement."[687]

Minatrea, Ogne and Roehl believe that leadership development does not take place primarily in the seminary but in church, on the job, and in context. Minatrea argues that the church must reclaim its role as the primary owner of the task of

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[683] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 176.
[684] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 181.
[685] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 153.
[686] Referring to John Maxwell's teachings on leadership.
[687] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 220.

Christian education for equipping missional leaders. "Other entities, universities, and seminaries assist the church in that task."[688] Ogne and Roehl write:

> Neither seminary nor seminar will prepare us to do ministry in the postmodern future. We believe that ministry equipping for transformissional church leaders will be just in time, on the job, on the Internet, in the church, and in the trenches… A whole new transformissional approach for equipping leaders will be needed. That approach will be personal ministry coaching – coaching that will pull together training and experience with context and reality.[689]

McNeal identifies four areas of learning that support the equipping of apostolic leadership: paradigm issues (how they see the world), micro-skill development (vision cultivation and casting, communication, team building, change management, mentoring and coaching, corporate culture management, conflict resolution, interpersonal skills, and others), resource development (prayer, people, time, money, facilities, technology), and personal growth.[690]

### Analysis

Equipping missional leaders emerges as a necessity in the Missional Conversation. Some stress that church-based training is more effective than seminary-based training as a primary vehicle for equipping leaders. The notion of apprenticeship comes across very clearly, equipping leaders on the job. There is no mention, however, whether any kind of formal training at the church level can be intentional or planned.

#### *When do the leaders stop leading or how are they removed?*

The Missional Conversation does not provide adequate answers to this question.

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[688] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 118.
[689] Ogne and Roehl, *Transformissional Coaching*, 19.
[690] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 130-136.

### Analysis

Who the leaders are and how they emerge are adequately dealt with in the literature, but the terms of service and longevity are not discussed. There are no hints on how leaders would stop leading.

#### *What are their primary responsibilities?*

The obvious responsibility of the leaders is leading. This is implied in all the literature. Also implied are the responsibilities of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, "pastoring", and teaching (based on Ephesians 4).[691] A few authors have explicitly identified other responsibilities.

According to van Engen, "the leaders equip, organize, assist, and serve the bearers and executors of the Spirit's gifts, but do not control, determine, or assign such gifts."[692] Van Gelder identifies the responsibility of "serving the needs of the broader church" and "providing effective rule in the life of the congregation."[693] McNeal identifies the responsibilities of strategizing, launching, and conducting a mission "for expanding the kingdom of God."[694]

Minatrea spells out specific responsibilities for the missional leadership team. Pray for the church and for the involvement of the members in the mission of God. Share with the congregation what God is doing through the various ministries. Ensure adequate preparation for ministries. Identify potential mission opportunities. Equip members according to their spiritual gifts and place them in ministries that match these gifts. Oversee budget requests for mission ministries. And lead in educating the members on getting involved in God's mission.[695]

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[691] For example, see the chapter on "The Genius of APEPT" in Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*.
[692] van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 154.
[693] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 183.
[694] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 136.
[695] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 146.

### Analysis

The primary responsibility of leaders, according to the Missional Conversation, is to lead. This is spelled out in the literature as coaching and mentoring, providing vision and direction, and mobilizing members towards that vision and direction. Leaders are expected to be holders of the vision. There is also consensus on considering Ephesians 4 as a model for leadership.

#### *How do they lead?*

Ogne and Roehl talk about leading by doing. Leaders lead by the example of their own spiritual journey and practices. They lead by their own authentic participation in spiritual community. They lead by taking, not just sending, their people to the culture to meet needs and make relationships.[696]

Lavin describes missional leadership as maieutic, from the Greek word *maietos*, which means assisting with birth, or being a midwife in the process of the birth of others. He characterizes this maieutic leadership as having courage and spiritual discernment, as inviting change while allowing for appropriate compromise, as readiness to follow the call of God and leave comfort zones in order to be part of the spiritual birth of others, and as partnership leadership that works with both lay and clergy.[697]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation refers to leading by example, by leaders taking their community on a journey and not just sending them. Leaders encourage a spirit of inclusion, inviting others to get involved in the leadership of the church. Leaders lead by doing.

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[696] Ogne and Roehl, *Transformissional Coaching*, 16.
[697] Lavin, *Witness*, 140-143.

### *How are decisions made?*

Van Gelder addresses the importance of having shared decision-making and mutual accountability in a congregation.[698] He calls this communal discernment, and identifies a five-fold process that governs it. The first process is *attending*, or giving attention to the context. The second process is *asserting*, or testing the different alternative actions in view of Biblical and theological understanding. The third process is *agreeing*, where the community agrees on the strategic action of choice. The fourth process is *acting*, or implementing the agreed-upon decision. The final process is *assessing*, a full review of the implications of the implemented decision.[699] Van Gelder then discusses several decision-making coalitions that can take place within a congregation. Missional congregations follow a *center-representative* coalition. This is when decision-makers are those serving in formal roles of leadership, along with those having informal influence within the congregation, who are all united on its vision and purpose and share the commitment to fulfilling them.[700]

Mancini expresses his understanding of missional decision-making in terms of alignment and attunement. This is where an environment of real dialogue (as opposed to discussion) is created within the congregation.[701]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation does not give much room for unilateral decisions. The role of leaders, according to the literature, is in discernment and discovery, and in facilitating corporate decision-making and communal discernment. Missional churches tend to be more decentralized in their decision-making. When leaders make

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[698] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 179.
[699] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 116-119.
[700] Ibid., 164.
[701] Mancini, *Church Unique*, 207-210.

decisions, they do not force them on the community but rather seek a high level of alignment and attunement within the community so that decisions emerge from the community. There is a high degree of consensus in the literature on these principles.

#### *Conclusion*

A lot has been written about missional leadership. Missional leadership is key for the Missional Conversation, at the very core of the community. The missional church and missional leadership are highly connected in the literature to the extent that it seems that there cannot be a missional community without adequate missional leadership. The literature bases leadership principles on criteria provided in Biblical texts, on spiritual giftedness, and on calling. Missional leaders act more as coaches than as managers. They work through the wider base of the church. Missional leaders are constantly on the lookout for latent talent to equip and mentor for ministry and for leadership. They use community discernment for decision-making.

### Proclamation and Discipleship

#### *What does proclaiming the Gospel mean? What is the Gospel?*

In answering the second part of the question first, "what is the Gospel", we get a variety of answers from the different authors. Guder puts it succinctly: "The gospel is Jesus himself". The good news is that "the reign of God is at hand."[702] Guder elaborates on this in a later work: "The *missio Dei* has always been the gospel, good news about God's goodness revealed in God's Word through Israel's experience, leading up to its climax and culmination in Jesus Christ."[703]

David Lowes Watson defines the message of the Gospel as including "the priestly work of Christ and the atoning grace through which we are reconciled to

[702] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 87.
[703] Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 47. Emphasis in original.

God." He adds: "No less at the heart of the gospel, however, is the prophetic announcement of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth: the promise of good news for the poor, release for captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed."[704] Writing to a North American audience that has a lot of wealth and clout, Watson finds that "what truly makes the gospel good news is its eschatological imperative."[705] Schwab stresses the same motif and gives a summary of the Gospel that is tied to mission: "Through Jesus Christ, God overcomes evil, sin, and death and works to bring the whole creation to fulfillment in the Holy Spirit. The mission is to love all and to seek justice for all and to talk with all of what God is doing in Jesus Christ."[706]

Brownson finds that the Gospel "is inextricably tied up with the identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth." "This 'good' news", he adds, "has *saving* significance. It promises good news for the poor, forgiveness for the sinner, wholeness for the body, freedom, joy, hope, and eternal life."[707] Putman and Stetzer emphasize that the point of the Gospel is to love God and love others, to live and love like Jesus.[708]

Van Gelder observes that the understanding of Gospel is a dynamic reality: "as the gospel engages new cultures within various contexts… missional congregations anticipate new insights into the fuller meaning of the gospel."[709] Banks touches on the

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[704] David Lowes Watson, "Christ All in All: The Recovery of the Gospel for Evangelism in the United States," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 189.

[705] Ibid., 193.

[706] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 147-148.

[707] James V. Brownson, "Speaking the Truth in Love: Elements of a Missional Hermeneutic," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 252. Emphasis in original.

[708] David Putman and Ed Stetzer, *Breaking the Discipleship Code: Becoming a Missional Follower of Jesus* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 77.

[709] van Gelder, "How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation About the Missional Church in Context," 39.

scope of the Gospel: “The gospel is not purely a personal matter. It has a social dimension. It is a communal affair. To embrace the gospel, then, is to enter into community.”[710]

In answering the first part of the question about proclamation, Guder warns about defining it in a narrow manner. “‘Proclamation’ as the primary form of witness has tended to narrow the understanding of witness to that which is oral, that which is said in a particular place (churches) by particular people (preachers or priests) at particular times (formal services of worship).”[711] There are implications for such a reductionist Gospel: “As the gospel proclaimed by the church has been reduced to individual salvation, that salvation has itself become the purpose and program of the church.”[712]

According to Barrett, the church is called to proclaim by speaking, being, and doing: “the church is called to proclaim Jesus Christ and to make Jesus Christ visible in their life as the body of Christ, so that grace may extend to more and more people, and God will be glorified.”[713] Brownson observes in the Gospel an opportunity to “be drawn into something larger than ourselves.” “The gospel sees our humanity not in terms of needs to be met, but in terms of capacities and gifts to be offered in God’s gracious service.”[714] “[T]he gospel is not just news to be heard. It is something like the script of a play to be performed.”[715]

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[710] Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 26-27.

[711] Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 61-62.

[712] Ibid., 133.

[713] Lois Barrett, "Embodying and Proclaiming the Gospel," in *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, ed. Lois Barrett, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.M. Eerdmans, 2004), 150.

[714] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 34.

[715] Ibid., 76.

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation does not support a narrow understanding of Gospel. The Gospel is defined in a variety of ways, all complementary. The Gospel is Jesus Himself; the Gospel is *missio Dei*; the Gospel is good news to the poor, the captives, and the oppressed; the Gospel is the identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the good news is its saving significance; the Gospel is a communal affair and has a social dimension. The literature describes proclamation in a holistic rather than reductionist way. Proclamation is by speaking, being, and doing. There is consensus in the literature on this understanding.

#### *How is it proclaimed?*

The Missional Conversation highlights many dimensions of how the Gospel can be proclaimed, but not at the expense of evangelism. Guder stresses that at the center or core of the *missio Dei* is evangelization or the communication of the Gospel. "Carrying the good news across all borders and into all the world is an essential part of the kingdom message which Jesus brought and embodied."[716] Brownson adds that this evangelism must be done in love: "The gospel is always spoken in love… *How* we speak is as important to our missional vocation as *what* we speak."[717] Watson points out that the "watchword for this (eschatological) evangelism is not 'Be saved!' but 'Be ready!'"[718]

Some authors characterize the proclamation as invitation. Brownson notes that "[t]he announcement of the gospel is an invitation to be caught up in God's surprisingly new way of working in the world."[719] Lavin sees proclamation as

[716] Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 49.
[717] Brownson, "The Church between Gospel and Culture," 258. Emphases in original.
[718] Watson, "Christ All in All," 193.
[719] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 41.

providing context for God to change and transform lives. "That context may be an invitation to pray, come to a Bible study, or worship or some event or concert at church where outsiders can see the faith community in action."[720]

Other authors describe proclamation as involvement. Van Gelder believes that "the gospel always meets people where they are, while calling them into a new space of living in the redemptive reality of God's kingdom reign." That is why he thinks that it is "crucial to find points of contact within the worldview of the other person in trying to present the gospel as good news."[721] Hunsberger sees this involvement as "offering a way to witness by going into and through the culture's pluralist assumptions rather than an evangelistic stance formed out of resistance and opposition to those dynamics."[722] Brownson adds another dimension to this involvement, an internal dimension:

> Christians are bearers and proclaimers of the gospel for and to one another. In order for this to happen, people must be involved with one another, spending time together, getting to know each another, sharing the joys and the sorrows of life.[723]

Many authors, such as Barrett, identify a multi-faceted approach to proclamation: "as the missional church makes its witness through its identity, activity, and communication, it is aware of the provisional character of all that it is and does."[724] Van Gelder summarizes all these dimensions in one word: living. "As the church lives before the world as a new humanity, there will be opportunities to give a word of witness that explains the 'hope that is in you'."[725] Frost, on the other hand,

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[720] Lavin, *Witness*, 53.

[721] Craig van Gelder, ed. *Confident Witness - Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 62.

[722] Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet," 23.

[723] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 124.

[724] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 126.

[725] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 152.

sums up the different dimensions using the term "prove". "We 'prove' the gospel by being a people who believe it and live by it."[726]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation understands proclamation of the Gospel as a multi-faceted approach, which is in complete alignment with its understanding of the Gospel. Finding points of contact with the culture is crucial for the Missional Conversation. Most of the literature highlights that proclamation takes place in multiple ways, by living and proving the Gospel. The rest of the literature focuses on specific areas of proclamation, such as evangelism, invitation, and involvement in society.

#### *How are disciples made?*

This question is answered in a variety of ways, none contradicting. All the answers seem to be complementary and make up the different pieces of the puzzle. Van Gelder and Rouse highlight spiritual gifts in the formation of disciples: "The corporate character of discipleship is seen in the development of spiritual gifts."[727] "Discipleship is all about helping God's people connect their faith and their gifts with God's mission in the world."[728]

Barrett and Guder, on the other hand, highlight the Bible in the formation of disciples. "The missional church is a community where all members are learning what it means to be disciples of Jesus. The Bible has a continuing, converting, formative role in the church's life."[729] "Listening to and responding to the Bible is the way

[726] Frost, *Exiles*, 104.
[727] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 152.
[728] Rouse and van Gelder, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation*, 65.
[729] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 59.

Christians learn 'how to follow Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth'."[730] Schwab, in addition to the Bible, identifies other important ingredients for the formation of disciples: "worship, regular reflection on scripture and daily life, discovery of their daily missions, and participation in service and justice ministries."[731]

Brownson recognizes the importance of shared discipleship: "In this way, each individual life bears witness to the power of the cross, and the shared life of the entire community bears witness with harmony, unity, and power to the mysterious way in which God brings life out of what the world calls death."[732]

Stetzer characterizes discipleship as imitation of Jesus: "Making and multiplying disciples involves three things: (1) living like Jesus lived, (2) loving like Jesus loved, and (3) leaving behind what Jesus left behind."[733] Stetzer makes the point that discipleship starts before conversion, "discipleship by allowing participation and experience even before conversion."[734]

Some authors identify practical steps for discipleship. Minatrea considers the following for preparing missional disciples: mission education, mission enlistment, mission equipping, and mission empowerment.[735] Stetzer takes the practical steps even further. He talks about creating a culture of discipleship. This takes place through three things: sequential discipleship (classes), discipleship by environment (worship service, social events, small groups), and nonsequential discipleship (combination of worship, ministry, evangelism, missions, fellowship, and education).[736]

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[730] Darrell L. Guder, "Biblical Formation and Discipleship," in *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*, ed. Lois Barrett, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004), 62.

[731] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 121.

[732] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 65.

[733] Stetzer and Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code*, 76.

[734] Ibid., 105.

[735] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 147-151.

[736] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 281-286.

#### Analysis

The Missional Conversation believes that discipleship is a corporate and shared task. It is not just an individualistic task apart from the community. Corporate discipleship is best accomplished when the gifts of the Spirit are highlighted. Discipleship starts before conversion and does not end. The Church, according to the Missional Conversation, has a culture of life-long discipleship.

#### *Conclusion*

According to the Missional Conversation, most of the churches operate as a centered set, although not many of them describe themselves that way. The understanding of Gospel within the Missional Conversation is holistic, pushing ministry outside the normal boundaries of the church. Figuring out how to operate in a centered set mentality, figuring out what (or who) constitutes the center and how to draw people to that center, frame the Missional Conversation. This centered set paradigm is characterized by proclamation as invitation to the center, where Jesus is, or the Gospel is. It is also characterized by life-long discipleship that aims to make people like Jesus, starting before conversion and continuing throughout the life of the disciple.

### Role of the Holy Spirit

#### *How does the Holy Spirit work in and through the Church?*

The role of the Holy Spirit is embedded within the Missional Conversation. It would be difficult to classify the answers in specific categories. I will mention only a few representative statements from the span of literature. Van Gelder describes the Spirit as creator of the community: “The Spirit creates a new type of reconciled community through accomplishing redemption and gives this community a new

identity as the church of Jesus Christ."[737] Not only that, but the church is "lead and taught by the Spirit."[738]

Guder also describes the important role of the Spirit: "A missional people walking in the Spirit, led by the Spirit, and sowing the Spirit manifests the fruit of the Spirit."[739] Specifically, it is "the work of the Spirit which makes one into a witness."[740]

Barrett identifies one of the patterns of a missional community is that it "confesses its dependence upon the Holy Spirit, shown in particular in its practices of corporate prayer."[741] Bullock highlights the empowering presence of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit empowers the church for living out its 'sent-ness'."[742] Brownson, similarly, underlines the empowering of the Spirit for the entire community: "The Spirit empowers a shared, communal form of life, in which individuals participate. The Spirit is the agent through whom a shared form of life comes into being."[743] Brownson adds that the Biblical call to imitate Christ is "an invitation to participate in the work of the Spirit, as the Spirit replicates the experience of Jesus among the people of God."[744]

Frost and Hirsch constantly reflect on the missional church as a movement and its implications: "In a missional church organized as a movement, the work of the Spirit is seen not only as important in the past but also as an experience in the present."[745]

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[737] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 41.
[738] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 142.
[739] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 147.
[740] Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 65.
[741] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 117.
[742] Bullock, "The Challenge of Developing Missional Denominational Agencies and the Implications for Leadership," 105.
[743] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 56.
[744] Ibid., 57.
[745] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 204.

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit and describes it in a multitude of ways, all of them leading to an understanding that the ministry of the church is contingent on the work of the Spirit. The answers to the question of *how* the Spirit works in and through the community are diverse and sometimes vague. It is clear that the Spirit is present. There is clarity about *what* the Spirit does, but not always clear on *how*. The area of spiritual giftedness provides the best clarity in this area, as observed earlier.

#### *In particular, how does He lead?*

There is consensus within the Missional Conversation about the leadership of the Holy Spirit in missional congregations. There is also consensus that He does that through a group of leaders in the church based on their giftedness. Barrett describes it this way:

> The Holy Spirit gives the missional church a community of persons who, in a variety of ways and with a diversity of functional roles and titles, together practice the missional authority that cultivates within the community the discernment of missional vocation and is intentional about the practices that embed that vocation in the community's life.[746]

Van Gelder specifies different areas that the Holy Spirit leads in: The Spirit creates the reconciled communities; The Spirit empowers leadership in guiding these communities; The Spirit leads these communities into sanctified living, into active ministry, and into the world to unmask the principalities and powers of the world.[747] Van Gelder describes elsewhere how this leading takes place:

> The Spirit is the source of the church's life and power. This life and power operate in the church in two distinct ways. The Spirit administers the grace of God within the community, resulting in grace-based ministry. And the Spirit empowers believers within the

[746] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 139.
[747] van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 41-46.

> community to function as channels of grace to one another, resulting in gift-shaped ministry.[748]

Guder explains the same concept in a very clear way: "Thus communities of giftedness are neither autocratic (the rule of one) nor democratic (the rule [of] the people) but pneumocratic (the rule of the Holy Spirit)." "The calling and affirming of leadership is perhaps one of the most important functions of pneumocratic discernment."[749]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation stresses *pneumocracy*, the rule of the Spirit, although not always explicitly referring to this term. This is where the Spirit gives diverse spiritual gifts to the leaders of the church and leads through them. Again, the majority of literature is clearer on the *what* than the *how* of the Holy Spirit's leadership.

### *Conclusion*

The work of the Holy Spirit is an important factor in the life of the church, according to the literature. However, the framework for that is not always clear. Nevertheless, a clear lens can be projected from the literature. The Holy Spirit works and leads through the community by the use of spiritual gifts, as given by the Spirit. This leads to community discernment and communal decision-making. The leaders of the church are endowed with leadership Spiritual gifts, often as articulated in Ephesians 4, so that they can facilitate the work of the Spirit within the community.

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[748] van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church*, 146.
[749] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 174.

**Ethics**

### *What characterizes a believer? Why?*

I did not find many descriptions within the Missional Conversation of what characterizes a believer. Frost and Hirsch, however, give a very clear answer: "What do 'holy ones' do? They live holy lives. This is what scholars have called the *indicative* and the *imperative*. The *indicative* defines us, and the *imperative* calls us to live the definition out in daily life." They continue: "Who I am, or rather who I have become, in Jesus, *must* change the way I behave and determine to a great extent what I do."[750]

Minatrea gives specific things that the "Kingdom Pilgrim" should be doing, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Aggressively, internally pursue the Kingdom of God here and now. Be a part of the prayer ministry. Be in ongoing community in an adult team. Share their faith weekly. Give financially sacrificially. Serve consistently in ministry. Help with special events during the year. And learn and apply one new discipline to life during the year.[751]

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation does not adequately answer this question. The literature merely highlights the fact that as individuals are called by the Spirit and sanctified by the Spirit then their lives should exhibit that called and sanctified life.

### *What particular behaviors and attitudes, if any, should characterize a believer?*

A few behaviors and attitudes are identified within the Missional Conversation that characterize a missional believer. Guder emphasizes holiness: "This holiness is demonstrated in the ways that it practices forgiveness, fosters healing and

[750] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 148. Emphases in original.
[751] Minatrea, *Shaped by God's Heart*, 130.

reconciliation, makes peace, loves righteousness, and walks in Jesus' footsteps."[752] Barrett identifies one of the patterns and practices of a missional church is to "embody mutual care, reconciliation, loving accountability, and hospitality." "A missional church is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another."[753]

Brownson writes about the disciple community that it "finds its righteousness – the righteousness that satisfies – only in receiving, celebrating, and manifesting the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God."[754] Schwab identifies what is expected of a "grown up" Christian: "Jesus is really most interested in how we live every moment, Monday to Monday. He calls us to live lovingly and justly all the time."[755]

#### Analysis

The Missional Conversation highlights a few attitudes that should be present in a believer, mainly holiness, loving one another, and living a life of mercy and compassion. Maturity is a theme that can be found in the literature as well.

#### *What are the behaviors or attitudes, if any, that a believer should avoid?*

The Missional Conversation does not directly address this question.

#### Analysis

Discussions in the literature on an individual level tend to be presented in a positive rather than a negative construction.

#### *What is the relationship between the Church and the surrounding society?*

A missional church is about the church being sent out. It is about "shifting the target of ministry efforts from church activity to community."[756] Hunsberger argues against the notion that there is "us" and "them", the gospel on one side and the culture

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[752] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 259.
[753] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, 84.
[754] Brownson, *Stormfront*, 123.
[755] Schwab, *When the Members Are the Missionaries*, 145.
[756] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 26.

on another. Whether we recognize it or not, we have a culture that we cannot shed. We simply sit on the culture side.[757] Therefore, how the church engages and interacts with the surrounding society is at the core of the missional literature. This is based on the fact that we are to be in the world but not of the world, which calls for a complex relationship. Michael W. Goheen explains this complexity: "On the one hand, the church is part of the cultural community and called to play a positive role in its development, shaping that formation with the gospel," he argues. "On the other hand, the church is called to an antithetical stance, critical of the idolatrous formation of human culture apart from Christ." [758] Mike Brantley is convinced that "biblical evangelism, discipleship, and community are interdependent and therefore distorted when dissected and considered apart from each other."[759]

In an attempt to answer the question of how the church sees and treats the surrounding culture, Brownson suggests: "The call to repentance is not the obliteration of each culture but rather the sanctification of each cultural setting so that it may offer a fuller and more perfect praise to God."[760] In order to accomplish this, Hall recommends that the church intentionally disengages from the dominant culture as a prerequisite of reengaging the same culture. Having known the particular segment of our society, we have the responsibility as well as the opportunity to reengage it. Douglas John Hall gives a plan on how the disengagement and reengagement can take place. He talks about four worldly quests that Christians can effectively engage from a new perspective of faith and hope: the quest for authenticity, the quest for meaningful

[757] George R. Hunsberger, "Birthing Missional Faithfulness: Accents in a North American Movement," *International Review of Mission* XCII, no. 365 (2003): 148-149.

[758] Michael W. Goheen, "The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America," *Missiology: An International Review* XXX, no. 4 (2002): 485.

[759] Mike Brantley, "The Fragrance: The Missional Church in C:/21," *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought & Practice* 13, no. 2 (2005): 33.

[760] Brownson, "The Church between Gospel and Culture," 238.

community, the quest for transcendence and mystery, and the quest for meaning.[761] Hunsberger simply states that the church should pay attention to the culture,[762] while Guder stresses "the need for Christian communities to be culturally bilingual."[763]

Guder,[764] as well as Frost and Hirsch,[765] explains the relationship of the church to the surrounding community using the concept of bounded sets and centered sets. Bounded sets and centered sets are two different ways that define the identity of churches. A bounded set has a structure and boundaries. Some people are in (members) and the rest are out. The members form a strong covenant community. The ministry of the church is largely congregational care. In a centered set, there are no clear boundaries that define membership. The role of the church is to invite all people towards the center – the center being the reign of God and not the local church – no matter where they are or how far they are. In other words, attractional churches tend to be bounded sets, incarnational churches centered sets. Guder, however, is not saying that missional congregations should be centered sets. "Missional communities", says Guder, "are more than centered-set congregations." "The missional community must be both centered and bounded."[766] The centered-set congregation invites people on a faith journey. The journey calls people to become pilgrim people, and that eventually calls for commitment. The people that have chosen to make that commitment become the covenant community, which works as a bounded set.

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[761] Douglas John Hall, "Ecclesia Crucis: The Theologic of Christian Awkwardness," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*, ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig van Gelder (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 203-212.

[762] Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet," 24.

[763] Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 94.

[764] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 201-214.

[765] Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 47-53.

[766] Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 207.

### Analysis

The Missional Conversation is unanimous in recognizing the important role the church has in the surrounding community. It calls for a shift of focus from internal ministry to engaging the community. A lot of discussion about culture and society takes place within the literature. A missional church strives to move its structure from a bounded set to more of a centered set, while still leaving elements of bounded sets. Probably the best way to describe the missional church is as a centered set with many concentric circles. Individuals are always drawn to the center, and as they approach the center, they become more involved in missional activities in the world.

### *Conclusion*

The Missional Conversation does not focus on behaviors and attitudes. However, there are many descriptions of maturity and sanctified life. On the other hand, no discussion of what needs to be avoided.

Concerning the relationship of the church to the surrounding community, the literature paints a very clear picture of what that looks like. A move towards a centered set, and commitment to engage the society and culture come out of the literature very clearly. There is no missional church without connection to its surroundings.

## *The Beginnings of a Great Conversation*

Great conversations often begin when two parties have similar interests and are willing to put those interests to further consideration and examination. In the case of this study, I intend to bring the Baptist church culture in Lebanon into conversation with the Missional Conversation and, by so doing, be challenged for honest reflection and self-evaluation. The Missional Conversation, specifically the understanding of the

Missional Church as defined by the Gospel and Our Culture Network, has the potential to provide a good challenge to the local church in Lebanon for the following reasons.

First, the concerns facing the church in Lebanon are not vastly different from those facing the church of Lesslie Newbigin and the Gospel and Our Culture Network. Even the backdrop of Christendom in the West is not too distant from the backdrop of the church in Lebanon. The challenges presented by the hierarchical institutional life of the church in Lebanon are not too different from those of Christendom in the West. Najeeb G. Awad, a Syrian-Lebanese theologian, argues that "Hierarchism is the foundational structure of the Arabic societal life, starting from the ruling state, institutions of education, civil society, religious institutions. …."[767] This is why, according to Awad, early Catholic missionaries "found only comparatively few problems in gaining the acceptance of the indigenous people of the East," while "Protestant leadership system and ecclesial, institutional structure were always under suspicion and discontent." [768] The challenge of institutionalized hierarchical ecclesial structure in Lebanon is not too different from that of the Western Christendom challenge. The missional model, in many aspects of its manifestation, can be as foreign to Western Christendom as it is to Lebanon. It is probable that the paradigm that was able to challenge Western churches post-Christendom can also challenge the Lebanese Baptist Church.

Second, the richness of the body of literature written on the missional church, with the outlining principles as well as experiences, provides a coherent lens that can be used for comparison and as a conversation partner. This literature articulates the

[767] Najeeb G. Awad, "Where Is the Gospel, What Happened to Culture?: The Reformed Church in Syria and Lebanon," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3, no. 3 (2009): 301.

[768] Ibid.

questions while it explores the answers. It provides a thoughtful theological tool that can be examined. In spite of the writers' diversity and their wide geographical scope, the writings are coherent enough with which to have a conversation with. Not many other perspectives can provide this coherence.

Third, my own experience with the Missional Church movement and literature provided the impetus to dig deeper. This spans my theological training in seminary, my lived experience being part of the journey of the Middle East Baptist Church, and my role in theological education in Lebanon. I am a witness to how the ideas presented by the Missional Conversation influenced a Western multicultural context, an Arab immigrant context, and a purely Arab context.

Fourth, I believe that the Middle East Baptist Church case study provides a compelling justification to try out the ideas and directions of the Missional Church in a wider context. What keeps ethnic churches alive in the West is not language as much as culture. Members of these congregations work hard on preserving their culture and heritage, although cultural assimilation in the span of generations is normal among ethnic churches.[769] Canada values and encourages the preservation of culture and heritage within the cover of multiculturalism.[770] Yet, in spite of that, the Missional Church movement and literature were able to influence this Middle Eastern church into a missional journey within the same generation of its start before cultural assimilation set in.

[769] Mark Mullins, "The Life-Cycle of Ethnic Churches in Sociological Perspective," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, no. 4 (1987): 323-325.

[770] The "Canadian Multicultural Act" was adopted by the Canadian government in 1998. The Act "specific the right of all to identify with the cultural heritage of their choice," and "sought to preserve, enhance, and incorporate cultural differences into the functioning of Canadian society." Michael Dewing, Canadian Multiculturalism, 5.

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I presented a detailed overview of the Missional Church movement and literature, expanded by authors that extended the conversation, by answering the same questions that were used in the Lebanese Baptist Church field research. As well, I presented the rationale for the use of the missional church literature that framed the Missional Conversation for this research, specifically the understandings of the Missional Church put forth by the Gospel and Our Culture Network, as a conversation partner with the Lebanese Baptist Church. In the next chapter, I engage in a conversation between my experience with and learning about the Lebanese Baptist Church through field research and case studies with the Missional Conversation framed in this chapter.

# Chapter Five: A Contextual Theology for the Lebanese Baptist Church

In the previous chapter, I presented a detailed overview of the Missional Church movement and the literature that came out of that movement in addition to other literature that extended the Missional Church movement conversation. In Chapter Three, I presented field research and case study data and considered how the Lebanese Baptist Church was changing in its missional understanding according to the seven categories used in the field research. In this chapter, I bring chapters three and four into a conversation together, using the Missional Church Conversation as a theological tool that can inform my analysis of the missional impulse of the Lebanese Baptist Church.

My objective in this dissertation is not to write a new comprehensive local theology. Robert J. Schreiter argues that the whole community is the theologian.[771] This is affirmed by Bevans as well,[772] although there are voices that disagree with them.[773] There is a distinct role, however, for the professional theologian, according to Bevans, which "is that of articulating more clearly what the people are expressing more generally or vaguely… and challenging them to broaden their horizons."[774] Schreiter contends that the responsibility of constructing a theology is that of the

[771] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 16-20.

[772] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev. and expanded ed., Faith and Cultures Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002).

[773] There are voices, especially Catholic, who argue against having a local and contextual theology. Gaillardetz argues that: "It is simply no longer the case, if it ever was, that each local church is rooted in one distinct cultural context. One of the consequences of postmodern globalization is the cross-pollination and hybridization of cultures, in which cultures exist in a complex state of interaction." Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent*, Theology in Global Perspective Series (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 291.

[774] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 18.

community: “Significant members within the community, often working as a group, give voice to the theology of the community.”[775]

My objective through this autoethnographic study, being both a subject and an object of my own experience, is to provide a reflexive theological perspective that may become an impetus for more theological inquiry by the Lebanese Baptist Church. It is my hope that this perspective will, as a community, help strengthen its missional impulse. According to Graham, “a reflexive, transparent and autobiographical approach to practical theology is essential if it is truly to be liberated from the hegemony of abstract reason and the privileging of theory over practice.”[776] Therefore, I offer my perspectives with humility as a platform that engenders more discussion and conversation.

As a result of the missional church conversation in North America, there have not been many attempts to develop an ecclesiology from a missional perspective. Some argue for a certain framework that can allow for a missional ecclesiology to emerge, but without introducing or redefining the ecclesiology.[777] Others highlight many missional principles that should inform and drive the ministry of the church, but without systematically dealing with all aspects of ecclesiology. For example, some highlight ethical implications of being missional without dealing with the

[775] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 17.

[776] Graham, "On Becoming a Practical Theologian", 5.

[777] One example is Richard H. Bliese, "The Mission Matrix: Mapping out the Complexities of a Missional Ecclesiology," *Word & World* 26, no. 3 (2006): 237-248. Bliese defines a “Mission Matrix” that can become the foundation for a missional ecclesiology, but without introducing or redefining the ecclesiology.

organizational and leadership structures that make that possible.[778] Graham Hill,[779] on the other hand, lays out a foundation for a missional ecclesiology. Yet he does not take it to the level of structure that can sustain the foundation. He addresses missional understanding but does not extend the conversation to the posture of the church that can support such an understanding. There may be value in developing the conversation into practical aspects and implications for the church to support and sustain a missional understanding of itself within its context.

My approach in this chapter, therefore, is to highlight the areas where the Missional Church Conversation can help the Lebanese Baptist Church find a vision for missional engagement while considering the contextual impact of its implementation.

## *Mission*

The Lebanese Baptist Church was the beneficiary of foreign mission work for a good portion of its short life. This has impacted the Church's understanding of mission. Mission primarily takes place from the West and the wealthy to the rest of the world. In addition, the use of language also had an impact. While the term *mission* in the Arabic language is often interchanged with *service* or *ministry*, what is typically understood is that service and ministry are domestic while mission takes place abroad.

Research among the Lebanese Baptist Church reveals that the concept of mission existed in its simplest form of evangelism and verbal proclamation, albeit

[778] One such example is Cornelius J. P. Niemandt, "Trends in Missional Ecclesiology: Original Research," *HTS: Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012). Another example is Wim A. Dreyer, "Missional Ecclesiology as Basis for a New Church Order: A Case Study," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013). Another such example is Mark Laing, "Recovering Missional Ecclesiology in Theological Education," *International Review of Mission* 98, no. 1 (2009): 11-24.

[779] Graham Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City: Introducing Missional Ecclesiology*, Kindle ed. (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

lacking the formal structures that support it. Many individuals within the Lebanese Baptist Church believed that mission is a way of life that should depict the life of every believer. Nevertheless, this belief did not find support within the corporate frameworks. According to the existing church structures, mission was an internal ministry of the church and evangelism ministries were invitational by nature. Non-believers were expected to come to a church building in order for them to meet God. Consequently, mission happened inside the four walls of the church, and the pastor, with the help of appointed leaders, was the primary vehicle for accomplishing this mission. Every member participated in God's mission through their way of life. Beyond that, mission was the role of the commissioned professional.

Missional theological education made an impact on the understanding of mission and ministry for the Lebanese Baptist Church. Graduates of ABTS's theological programs started to assess their own ministries based on missional engagements, missional in the sense of *sent-outness* where every member sees himself or herself as a missionary of the Church, and that mission was mostly an external expression of the church in the world rather than an internal program within the church.

As the Lebanese Baptist Church was being challenged with a missional understanding of the role of the Church, and as the focus of the ministry of the Church started to shift outward, the refugee crisis began. Although Syrian refugees were not a welcomed entity in Lebanon, even within the Lebanese Baptist Church, God prompted the churches to respond to the humanitarian disaster. Many churches responded, slowly at first, then serving refugees gradually became their core ministry. However, serving refugees brought back the location of the ministry to the inside. This has somewhat countered the external focus of theological education.

Nevertheless, the refugee crisis, by necessity, started to expand the base of those involved in mission. Mission started to take on a different shape. Concern for the whole of the person, physically in addition to spiritually, became the standard.

More recently, the pandemic forced another shift in how the Lebanese Baptist Church thought of mission. As the pandemic disrupted the gathering of believers on Sunday mornings, the focus of the ministry of the Church turned outwards. The refugee community could no longer gather at a church building to be served. Churches continued serving them outside the four walls of their buildings. This direction intensified after the Beirut blast of 4 August 2020. Churches in the vicinity of the explosion immediately sprang into action, going down to the streets of Beirut to serve the people most affected by the devastation.

This is a major shift in the response of the Lebanese Baptist Church. I grew up during the Lebanese civil war (1975 – 1990) a part of this Baptist community, and I witnessed how the Church was in survival mode and did not respond to the needs around it. In contrast, the Lebanese Baptist Church today has been transformed to the point that giving priority to serving the needy where they are became the most natural response.

The transformation that has taken place within the Lebanese Baptist Church, the change in praxis and lived experience, has outpaced the change in formal understanding of the theology that motivates their actions. The churches are still in the middle of this transformation and have not had adequate space or means to rethink their theology and their formal understanding of missions. This is why I believe that the Missional Church Conversation, as a theological tool, can help provide language to what is already taking place within the Lebanese Baptist Church, and can provide new theological frameworks that may benefit it.

The Missional Church Conversation emphasizes mission as the essence of the Church or a primary function of it. Church and mission are inseparable. This is a growing understanding in the Lebanese Baptist Church. Although this is not recognized formally, this deep connection between church and mission is becoming a reality. As the recognition of this reality develops, I expect that this will have a wide impact on the ministry of the Church. If mission becomes the focus of the ministry, then this may take place at the expense of other programs in the church. To evaluate the need for ongoing programs may be a positive outcome. However, this should not happen at the expense of congregational care that marks the ministry of the Lebanese Baptist Church today. In addition, a question that is being asked globally today, is what will church ministry look like post pandemic. Churches have learned valuable lessons during the pandemic. Should church ministry return to the way it was before the pandemic or was this disruption a good impetus to move the ministry of the Church in a different direction? The Lebanese Baptist Church needs to wrestle with this very question. What will turn out to be the primary focus of the Church will likely reveal the extent of transformation that has taken place in recent years.

For the Missional Church Conversation, the *missio Dei* emerges as a normative paradigm for mission. The Church engages in God's redemptive work in this world. The common language for the Lebanese Baptist Church, on the other hand, is to speak of the mission of the church rather than the mission of God. *Missio Dei* can serve as an important reframing of the understanding of mission within the Lebanese Baptist Church. The strength of this framework is that it relates to the work of God and can take shape in all cultures. *Missio Dei* can engage incarnationally all cultures

of the world and can have profound implications on them.[780] The way mission is accomplished takes different forms as it incarnates in specific cultures, but cultures do not change what mission is because it gets its definition from God's intentions in the world.

If the Lebanese Baptist Church were to adopt a *missio Dei* framework then mission will become the defining factor for all its activities. The Lebanese Baptist Church's self-understanding will evolve from existing for its own sake, hence shepherding ministries having priority, to existing for the sake of the world, therefore incarnational missional ministries take priority. This may impact even the churches' teaching and preaching ministries to become more focused on equipping the congregation for missional engagement in the world. This will also impact the structures and organization of the churches.

*Missio Dei* is the sending of God, sending the Church into the world. By adopting this framework, this will have a major impact on the Lebanese Baptist Church's approach to reaching others. As mentioned earlier, the Lebanese Baptist Church's traditional approach is that evangelism takes place internally, as an invitational ministry. People come into a church building to meet God, and if they choose to come in then they are likely open to hearing the Gospel. By adopting a going-out approach, this means that the Lebanese Baptist Church needs to become skilled in presenting God to the world, outside the security of its own church community, and possibly presenting the Gospel to people who might be hostile to it. Lebanon has a tapestry of religions, with varying degrees of tension between the religious groups from time to time. The Lebanese Baptist Church will need to acquire

[780] Paul H. De Neui, "Christian Communitas in the Missio Dei: Living Faithfully in the Tension between Cultural Osmosis and Alienation," *Ex auditu* 23 (2007): 93.

skills in communicating the Gospel and navigating in this difficult religious and political setting, learning how to proclaim the Gospel without proclaiming a religion.[781]

The Missional Church Conversation highlights the importance of priesthood of all believers. This understanding levels the playing field between all the members of the Church, and especially between the clergy and the laity. All the members of the Church take part in this priestly role. The Lebanese Baptist Church declares its belief in this concept. However, this belief is neither practiced nor can be accommodated within current church structures. As the ministry base within the Lebanese Baptist Church is widening due to the emerging response ministries, it can be inspired by the Missional Church Conversation to move from priesthood of the ordained or priesthood of the commissioned to the priesthood of all. Such a move proved to be of great importance in the missional journey of the Middle East Baptist Church.[782] This change in practice to become consistent with the stated conviction can be as significant for the Lebanese Baptist Church.

## *Church*

At the time of the field research, the Lebanese Baptist Church viewed itself as the gathered community that makes up the body of Christ. Its purposes mainly revolved around itself, on its internal being, and on everything that a church needs to do to be a healthy community. Healthy was understood as a community that maintains its internal structures and programs, enjoys good quality teaching and preaching, observes the ordinances of the church, and its members live out decent Christian lives. Participating in the mission of God was largely absent from the Church's thinking. In

[781] This is developed further later in this chapter.
[782] Case study presented in Chapter Three.

its official documents, the Lebanese Baptist Church included the purposes of proclamation and serving humanity. Its structures and activities, however, indicate that these purposes were viewed as internal to the Church. No active presence of the Church in the community was sought, and strategies and structures that support the mission of the Church outside its four walls were lacking.

The Lebanese Baptist Church functioned as an organization with clear hierarchies. Although there were experiments in plurality of leadership, in developing matrix structures, and in forming flexible teams, hierarchy remained heavy at the top with growing flexibility and agility in the middle. Despite the many experiments, the Lebanese Baptist Church still functioned as an autocracy, with either a single person or a single committee at the top of the hierarchy. The field research revealed a direct correlation between flexibility and inclusive structures within the local church and more involvement and commitment by its members. The more the local church afforded flexibility the more members were committed and involved.[783]

The Lebanese Baptist Church had not made the connection between the Church and the Kingdom of God at the time of the research. The language of the Kingdom was largely absent from its vocabulary. This may be due to the reactive tendencies of Lebanese Baptists. It is possible that because the language of the Kingdom was heavily used by Jehovah's Witnesses,[784] Lebanese Baptists had tended to drop the use of the term. There was an obvious disconnect in the minds of the interviewees between the church and the Kingdom. Church members were mostly unaware of the connection to the Kingdom as they went about their daily lives.

[783] This was presented in Chapter Three.

[784] Resisting the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses is taken seriously by Lebanese Baptist Church. Cf. *The Evangelical Baptist Churches in Lebanon: Ministry Profile*.

Theological education has stretched the understanding of church leaders exposed to it from the Church as merely the community of God's people to the Church as the community of God's people on mission with God and representing the Kingdom of God. Theological education provided a strong theological foundation for the understanding of the purposes of the Church. Those benefiting from theological education no longer separated between being a community of God and being on mission with God. This change in focus motivated a growing awareness of the needs of the churches' surrounding communities to engage them in meaningful and effective approaches. This also encouraged a shift in thinking about structures from frameworks that manage internal ministries to platforms that enable external ministries. And it was easy for theologically trained leaders to make a strong connection between the role of the Church and the Kingdom of God acting in the world.

The recent crises have also contributed to stretching the Lebanese Baptist Church's understanding of itself, but more so from a praxis standpoint than theological and cognitive ones. The Church was thrusted into new areas of ministry, thus expanding and deepening the understanding of ministry and gospel and giving the churches a new sense of purpose and meaning. The Lebanese Baptist Church started to experience its existence as for the sake of others. This shift started to take place during the refugee crisis and intensified during the subsequent crises. As discussed in Chapter Three, the Church started to view itself as being the Church when it is serving others rather than merely gathering in a church building.

These shifts have forced the churches to operate outside their established structures, thus widening the base of leaders and decision-making beyond the

traditional model. The hierarchies stretched while power remained concentrated at the top.

The Church is changing and is being transformed. There was no need for an external impetus for that. The change is being influenced from within, God prompting His people into action, and from the context that is presenting new challenges. As the Lebanese Baptist Church is being transformed in its praxis, its theological reasons for doing that have not caught up yet. This is where I believe that the Missional Church Conversation can fill this gap by giving language to what is already taking place and by suggesting frameworks that may strengthen the theological foundation of the experienced changes.

The Missional Church Conversation describes the church using the three dimensions of *being*, *doing*, and as an *agent* or *instrument*. These three dimensions are core to the Missional Church Conversation and are strongly interconnected in this theoretical framework. The Church *is* the community of God's redeemed people. This is the *being* dimension. This community is on mission with God, and its primary purpose is to reach the world. This is the *doing* dimension. And the Church is an *agent* or *instrument* of the Kingdom of God. This is the third dimension.

The Lebanese Baptist Church resonates well with the *being* dimension. This dimension is its strength. The *doing* dimension is steadily becoming a reality within the Lebanese Baptist Church, although it has not yet been articulated theologically. This is closely connected with having mission at its core and viewing itself as an essential part of *missio Dei*, being sent out into the world. As for the third dimension, although the Lebanese Baptist Church has been more and more acting as an *agent* of the Kingdom of God, the mental connection between the lived reality and the cognitive understanding is still lacking. As more local church leaders step back and

reflect on what is changing within the Lebanese Baptist Church, I expect that these multiple dimensions that define the Church will become more apparent and central to its self-understanding. The challenge for the Lebanese Baptist Church is that it grows in its theoretical understanding and practical implementation of the *doing* and *agency* dimensions not at the expense of the *being* dimension, which is its strength. These three dimensions ought not be in conflict with each other but should rather be viewed as complementary.

In addition to the definition and purposes of the Church, the Missional Church Conversation provides insights on structure. Although the Missional Church Conversation presents the Church as a movement, structures are still highlighted as important. These structures, however, are subject to the Church's understanding of itself as an *organism* rather than an organization. This means that structure should be nimble, quick to react to the changing realities, and follows the leading of the Holy Spirit. The shape of the Church, according to the Missional Church Conversation, is *pneumocratic* rather than autocratic or democratic. The Missional Church Conversation expands in defining how the Holy Spirit rules.[785] The question is, can this theoretical construct be helpful to the Lebanese Baptist Church in its present ecclesiological journey?

The Lebanese Baptist Church functioned as an organization since its inception and for many decades. Structures were detailed in constitutions and bylaws and were followed to a large extent. Different church ministries and programs were unchanged from year to year, led by annually elected committees. The purpose was to maintain the existing ministries and programs. Change was slow inside the Church even though the context of the host communities was rapidly changing. The Lebanese Baptist

[785] Further treatment of this topic later in this chapter.

Church was still functioning within what Meral describes as *resignation reaction* or *emigration reaction*.[786] During the last decade, however, the Lebanese Baptist Church started to operate with an *engagement reaction*. The heavy, strict, and limiting organizational structures started to give way to a more *ad hoc* way of operating in response to the prevailing needs. The Lebanese Baptist Church started to function as an organism without giving it much thought or reflection. New responses emerged, with new leaders and new teams. New decision-making schemes were invented, by necessity. What is still missing is for the Lebanese Baptist Church to articulate theologically what is becoming a reality on the ground. The big test, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is what will happen to the Lebanese Baptist Church post pandemic. Will it resort back to the old structures and try to re-align its ministries accordingly, or will it align its structures with the new ministry realities? Change in structure can either be prescriptive, aligning ministry with the understanding and the theology of the community, or descriptive, allowing the transformed realities resulting from God's work in the community to shape the theology of the community and the structures that support it. As change in praxis has outpaced change in theology, the Lebanese Baptist Church needs to work hard on bridging this gap. The Missional Church Conversation's exhortation is to think about the Church as an organism that can continue to be flexible as the community is sent into the world responding to its needs by proclaiming the Gospel.

According to the Missional Church Conversation, at the core of the Church's self-identification as an organism lies *pneumocracy* as a governance framework. The recognition that it is God, the Holy Spirit, who shapes the Church and its ministries and not its leaders can be a difficult shift in paradigm. I do not believe that this

[786] Described in Chapter Three.

governance framework is in opposition to Lebanese leadership forms and styles. *Pneumocracy* need not be concerned with who the leaders are and what church governance is in place as much as how leaders lead.[787] A *pneumocratic* paradigm proved to be helpful for the Middle East Baptist Church's missional journey. It may be helpful for the Lebanese Baptist Church just as well.

## *Growth and Reproduction*

The field research revealed that the Lebanese Baptist Church encourages maturity in Christian living through preaching and teaching and through mentoring and modeling the Christian life. It fosters maturity in ministry by providing opportunities for members to get involved. However, at the time of the research, the Lebanese Baptist Church did not perceive that it was successful in the areas of growth and reproduction. Church attendance had been declining for many years, and external ministries were not present. This perceived decline was not based on pre-established metrics. The perception resulted from quantitative decline in attendance. There was steady growth in personal Christian maturity, decline in numbers, and no significant involvement in ministries of reproduction.

As the recent crises have shifted the focus of church ministry, a lot has changed. Churches started to experience growth in numbers again, at least as the result of refugee communities being drawn to the churches that are caring for them. But more than that, there was growth in both the depth and breadth of ministry, and in the maturity of those serving, in ministry skills, and in their understanding and experience of the Gospel. This growth was unplanned. The Lebanese Baptist Church did not plan for the crises. It merely felt compelled to respond. Consequently, growth

[787] More on that below.

was an unplanned outcome. Another unplanned outcome was the bonding that started to take place between communities, within church communities that are serving together, and between church communities and the communities being served.

The recent crises have stimulated the Lebanese Baptist Church to think about growth. Churches are finding themselves in a place where they need to understand this growth, manage it, sustain it, and learn from it. In terms of measuring the growth, more attention is being given to assessing the impact of the humanitarian ministries. Some assessment is being done quantitatively, churches reporting on numbers of people served, for example. Other assessments are qualitative, anecdotally reporting on impact. A lot of the metrics of these humanitarian ministries are being driven by donors who are supporting financially the work of the local churches. The donors are looking for numbers and for evidence of impact.

The impact of theological education has been the growing understanding of the organic nature of the Church and that it is on mission with God. Theological education has stimulated those benefitting from it to place more attention on growth that is manifested externally and not solely internally.

The Missional Church Conversation affirms what is recently learned by the Lebanese Baptist Church that growth frequently happens through conflict and disruption more than through planned strategy. How the Church responds in time of crisis can open up key opportunities for ministry that accelerate the Church's growth.

The Missional Church Conversation provides a spectrum of signs of growth, from group motivation and involvement, to a high level of obedience to God, to normalizing serving and sending, to the formation of the right habits and practices.

The Missional Church Conversation does not neglect numerical growth. Quantitative measurements are still important. However, the metrics shift from

measuring the number of people attending a church service on Sundays to measuring the number of people being equipped and released into the world for service. However, the Missional Church Conversation promotes more qualitative measurements. It measures the apostolic impulse of the congregation by observing the shift from inorganic to organic, from programs to processes, from attractional to incarnational, and from seating to sending. A key area of growth, according to the Missional Church Conversation, is by submitting to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Lebanese Baptist Church is also experiencing a shift that is encouraged by the Missional Church Conversation, which is to think more about impact. The Lebanese Baptist Church is learning how to measure impact, although this is never straight forward. This is not well articulated by the Missional Church Conversation either.

In addition, if success in Christian life and church life is achieved through faithfulness, then different means of articulating that and measuring it may need to be developed. If means are as important as the ends, and if God is primarily responsible for the ends as people are responsible for the means, then metrics should acknowledge that and react to it. How can a church measure the impact of people living incarnationally? The church cannot directly do that, but it may be able to measure whether it is done, by how many, for how long, whether the church is praying through it, giving towards it, etc. This is why it is particularly important for the churches to be able to articulate their purposes and functions clearly so that they have a clear baseline to measure against.

The Missional Church Conversation provides an important challenge to the Lebanese Baptist Church in the shift in emphasis from growing the local church to growing the Kingdom. As the Lebanese Baptist Church is experiencing more bonding

among the communities collaborating in external service, it may prove helpful for this thinking to permeate throughout the church communities. This will encourage a shift in attitude between the local churches from a spirit of competitiveness to a spirit of partnership in *missio Dei*.

## *Leadership*

The typical leadership style in Lebanon for a religious community is the solo leader, the capable, multi-gifted, and powerful individual positioned at the top of the hierarchy, which gives the leader almost unquestioned authority. Not much research has been done on church leadership styles in a Middle Eastern church context. Farida Saidi conducted comparable research for a North African church context.[788] She identified four leadership styles, the Shepherd, the Sheikh, the Servant, and the Holy Man. Reflecting on leadership in the Lebanese Baptist Church, it is common to see a combination of the four leadership styles identified by Saidi. The leader or pastor is no question the shepherd, taking care of the flock and ensuring their growth. The pastor is also the sheikh, who exercises a consultative approach to decision-making. The sheikh consults his advisers then makes the decisions himself, confidently and authoritatively. The pastor is the servant, serving his flock in all different ways, in all areas of life, not just spiritual. Whether the need is medical or legal or doing business, or looking for a new home, the congregation frequently seeks the pastor for assistance. And the pastor is the holy man, expected to be without reproach, almost understood to mean without sin, thus leading to limited transparency at the top.

The leadership style among Lebanese Baptist churches has been changing recently. The crises and the subsequent growth in external ministries have

[788] Farida Saidi, "A Study of Current Leadership Styles in the North African Church" (PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2011).

necessitated the appointment of a wider base of leaders, accompanied by some empowerment. A lot of flexibility in leadership style and in making decisions is increasingly being afforded to leaders of ministries within the church. However, a lot of power is still concentrated at the top. More and more daily operational decisions are being delegated to the ministry leaders while key decisions remain the responsibility of the top leader.

No formal succession plans are in place for leaders, with no formal training opportunities. As members get involved in ministries, leaders among them are discovered. Some informal mentoring occurs, but no formal systems are in place to train candidates to prepare them for top leadership positions. This frequently leads to senior leaders staying in their positions for a long time with no obvious replacements in sight. As more ministry opportunities have become available during the recent crises, more members got involved and were exposed to leadership responsibilities. This has enlarged the pool of candidates to top leadership positions. The Lebanese Baptist Church is witnessing recent growth in new ministry initiatives led by a new generation of leaders.

Church leaders exposed to theological education have evolved in their thinking about leadership to allow for plurality of leadership and thus creating space for more formal training and equipping of aspiring leaders. This has not resulted in much structural change within the Lebanese Baptist Church yet. It may take some time for structures to follow what is already happening on the ground.

The Missional Church Conversation has a lot to offer in the area of leadership. A lot of emphasis is put on missional leadership as a necessary requirement for a church to become missional. The missional impulse comes from the leaders.

According to the Missional Church Conversation, a church cannot become missional if it does not have missional leaders leading the journey.

Although the Missional Church Conversation is not concerned with specific modes of church governance, plurality of leadership comes across as a key feature of a missional church. Ephesians 4:11-12 is commonly used as a paradigm for a missional church. The leadership spiritual gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching are given to the leaders of the church to be used in equipping the members for the work of ministry. This is understood that first, leadership gifts are given to multiple individuals. This is a move from the omni-gifted pastor to the leadership team with complementary gifts. Secondly, the stress in this paradigm is on the members doing the work of ministry while the leaders are the ones preparing them and equipping them. This is a move from the leaders as *the* ministers to leaders as coaches of ministry. This move narrows the gap between clergy and laity and affirms the priesthood of all believers where some are called to church-based ministry and others are called to ministry outside and on behalf of the church. And, thirdly, leadership is not only concerned with shepherding, which is an internal function of the church. Leadership spiritual gifts that marshal external ministries are as important if not more. This understanding opens up the way to exploring what *pneumocracy* looks like in a missional church.

The Missional Church Conversation gives the Lebanese Baptist Church a lot to consider in the area of missional leadership. The first issue is the plurality of leaders and power dynamics. The need for a single leader at the top of a religious community is reinforced by cultural expectations in Lebanon. The question that emerges is this: If the society expects the top leadership position to be a position of ultimate power, can leadership in a church setting look differently? Some of the

hesitation may come from the thinking that the opposite of leading with ultimate power, is leading through powerlessness. Regina Coll, a long-time researcher in the field of power and empowerment, makes the case otherwise. She contends that power need not be manipulative, and powerlessness may not be the ultimate virtue. The solution, in her opinion, is empowerment, which is well achieved through education.[789]

Empowerment is a value that is shared between the Missional Church Conversation and the corporate world in North America. This is something that I personally lived and experienced.[790] This reduces resistance when implementing an empowerment model in a North American church. However, as empowerment is not the norm in Lebanese corporate culture, implementing an empowerment model in a Lebanese Baptist church can prove to be difficult. This is where theological education can play a key role in changing mindsets by providing the needed education.

While the Missional Church Conversation emphasizes plurality in leadership, this is not presented as in conflict with having a solo leader at the top or a leader among leaders. The issue for the Missional Church Conversation is that of power sharing rather than flattening a hierarchy. A proper understanding and implementation of empowerment, within whatever structure is adopted by the Lebanese Baptist Church, can make a *pneumocratic* framework plausible.

One of the main challenges for the Lebanese Baptist Church is that the divide between the clergy and the laity is deep. A member of the laity can become a member of the clergy only through official ordination. This entirely undermines the belief in

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[789] Regina Coll, "Power, Powerlessness and Empowerment," *Religious Education* 81, no. 3 (1986): 419.

[790] Elie Haddad, "Cultural Analysis of My Workplace" (Toronto: Tyndale Seminary, 2001). (Unpublished paper available through the author). I wrote this paper during my seminary years while I was working as a full-time Senior Management Consultant. I evaluated and assessed the cultural values that were operational in my workplace then.

the priesthood of all believers. The Lebanese Baptist Church formally believes in the priesthood of all believers, but what is practiced is the priesthood of the ordained. This naturally limits the power, the responsibilities, the involvement, and the efficacy of the "laity". Another major consequence is the restrictions that women experience in ministry. Since serious ministry is confined to the ordained, and the Lebanese Baptist Church does not ordain women, it follows that there are no notable ministries that women can be part of.

One way out of this dilemma is for the Lebanese Baptist Church to abandon the language of ordination and revert to the Bible's teaching on the laying of hands. Laying of hands can be performed on church leaders to set them apart for their church-based ministry. Similarly, little by little, as the Church recognizes the other gifts and roles that are present in the congregation, the Church can practice the laying of hands on the members of the congregation to set them apart and release them to do ministry in the workplace or marketplace. The Missional Church Conversation encourages the laying of hands for the school teacher to be set apart for ministry at school, and the carpenter to be set apart for ministry among other carpenters and customers, and so forth. As this becomes a normal practice within the Lebanese Baptist Church, and as the congregation starts to pray for and encourage and support such ministries, considering them as an essential part of the ministry of the church, the gap between clergy and laity will likely disappear.

This framework will equalize the ministry of men and women and would expand the pool of "ministers" to the entire congregation. There are two difficulties with this framework, however. The first is representation in government. Who will be able to perform official ceremonies and how? The second is social. Religious leaders and "men of the cloth" are revered in Lebanon and are given preferential treatment in

the society at large. Giving this up can be an unwelcome sacrifice. The solution that I would like to put forward is for the Lebanese Baptist Church to adopt the laying of hands as the theological, spiritual, and ecclesial practice that sets apart all members of the congregation for effective service, leaders and members alike, men and women alike. Official ordination can still be done, as a civic function, to be able to serve the congregation in official matters pertaining to the government. I still contend that servant leaders should avoid being in a place to be revered.

Coming back to the leadership spiritual gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11, the list identifies apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The Missional Church Conversation stresses on this APEPT model, APEPT being an acronym of the five functions or gifts that are needed in leadership. The Lebanese Baptist Church recognizes, similar to the majority of the global Church, the *pastor* as the key leader of the local church. This is assumed and taken for granted. I experience this regularly with my students. When we embark on a biblical word study of the leaders of the church, it is always assumed that the primacy of the *pastor* is well articulated in the New Testament. It is always a surprise when they discover that this is not the case. The usage of the term *pastor* to signify the key leader of the church may have worked well in a Christendom church where ministry took place internally hence shepherding the flock was the priority. But what about a context like Lebanon's? In a multi-religious context, growth is severely limited when ministry is only invitational. Muslims are not likely to walk in the door of a church building to discover the Gospel. To lead and mobilize the church in external ministries then a different gift set is needed. If we were to give significance to the order of the list of functions or gifts given by Paul in Ephesians 4:11, *apostles* comes first. Why not the key leader of a missional church be referred to as an *apostle* rather than a *pastor*? This would no

doubt be a huge change for the Lebanese Baptist Church, a change that will likely draw a high level of resistance. Change in this situation can be achieved slowly and methodically. Renaming the key leader of the church will not mean anything if not preceded by gradual changes in practice coupled with concentrated teaching.

Priesthood of all believers, power sharing, decentralized decision-making, diverse spiritual gifts given to multiple leaders, church leaders as coaches, men and women in ministry, all of these ideas together start to give shape to what the Missional Church Conversation coins as *pneumocratic*. More is written on this below under the section of the Holy Spirit.

## *Proclamation and Discipleship*

The Lebanese Baptist Church has been operating within a sectarian and religiously pluralistic environment since its inception. It was always a minority within the religious tapestry of Lebanon. As discussed earlier, this has contributed to the Lebanese Baptist Church adopting a *resignation reaction* with a bounded set mentality. Its understanding of the nature of the Gospel was shaped by that reality. The Lebanese Baptist Church understood the Gospel exclusively as individual spiritual salvation, which is proclaimed verbally. According to the field research, many individuals within the Lebanese Baptist Church believed in a social dimension to the Gospel, but mostly as an evangelistic tool, as means to an end, individual spiritual salvation being that end. Any social dimension to the ministry of the Church faced resistance and was labeled as compromise and treated as such. Social work was relegated to social agencies and non-governmental organizations. This was not the churches' concern.

Within this framework, discipleship was random and informal, and was limited to the equivalence of a membership course that moves individuals who have

been spiritually saved from outside the bounded set to the inside. Hence, discipleship contained basic doctrines of the faith coupled with instructions in the acceptable religious norms and practices of the community. The aim was for the outsider to become an insider, spiritually, culturally, and behaviorally.

This has changed a lot in the last fifteen years. The understanding of what the Gospel is has grown and expanded. This change came from two different directions. The first direction came from the praxis of the church communities. As God prompted the churches to respond to the suffering caused by the various crises, serving others socially and physically, in addition to spiritually, quickly became part of the understood mandate of the Church, a central part of the Gospel. The other direction of change came from theological education. Church leaders exposed to theological education learned about an integrated Gospel that was concerned with the whole person.

These changes have taken the Lebanese Baptist Church out of its *resignation reaction* and propelled it into a *prophetic engagement reaction*. This change has been gradual. With the humanitarian crisis caused by the influx of Syrian refugees, The Lebanese Baptist Church started its response through invitational ministry. By the time the pandemic hit, and invitational ministries became restricted, the churches continued to serve out in the community. The response to the suffering caused by the Beirut explosion of 4 August 2020, revealed a complete changed in the Lebanese Baptist Church's understanding of what the Gospel is. Integral mission became a lived reality among the churches.

The Lebanese Baptist Church has been growing from a bounded set into a centered set throughout these recent years. I have personally lived through and experienced this slow and subtle change. When the Syrian refugees started to flow

into Lebanon and our small local church started to care for those settling around it, many of the Syrian refugees that our church cared for started to attend our Sunday morning worship service. I still vividly remember the first time that they came into our church meeting. The women had their Muslim head covering on. They looked differently than us, they dressed differently, they spoke differently, they smelled, and they sat in our favorite seats. This was unsettling for our small community. What do we do with this? How do we react? How do we partake in the Lord's supper, a practice that is highly protected and regulated in our churches? How do we preach and teach having a new audience in mind? The change was not immediately noticeable. But, within a few years, having veiled women in a church service became a common occurrence, not only acceptable but encouraged and celebrated.

The Missional Church Conversation presents a framework for understanding the Gospel and its proclamation not too different from where the Lebanese Baptist Church is today, although arriving there through completely different journeys. The context that prompted the Missional Church Conversation was not refugees and economic crises. The Missional Church Conversation is a theological construct. This is why I find it provides a powerful theological tool as a conversation partner with the Lebanese Baptist Church. Having this theoretical outcome match the praxis outcome coming out of the Lebanese Baptist Church's response to God in times of crises is affirming and encouraging. This gives more credence to what the Missional Church Conversation can offer in this area.

The Missional Church Conversation defines the Gospel in a variety of ways. The Gospel is Jesus Himself; the Gospel is *missio Dei*; the Gospel is good news to the poor, the captives, and the oppressed; the Gospel is the identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the Good News is its saving significance; the Gospel is a

communal affair and has a social dimension; etc. In other words, the Gospel is dynamic. New meaning of the Gospel can be experienced as it engages new cultures within new contexts and as it faces new circumstances and challenges.

This is another instance where the Missional Church Conversation provides language to what is already taking shape within the Lebanese Baptist Church. The Lebanese Baptist Church is experiencing the dynamic nature of the Gospel but has not articulated it that way.

The way the Gospel is proclaimed, according to the Missional Church Conversation, is by speaking, by being, and by doing. It is the integral Gospel, *integral mission*. The Gospel is proclaimed through the Church's identity, activity, and the way it communicates. This holistic understanding of proclamation should not pose a threat to the Lebanese Baptist Church's understanding, especially that the multi-dimensional understanding of Gospel within the Missional Church Conversation does not in any way diminish from the importance of evangelism, which remains at the center.

Furthermore, the Missional Church Conversation articulates well what it means for the Church to become a centered set community where Jesus is at the center. This can help provide a healthy conversation within the Lebanese Baptist Church. The Lebanese Baptist Church has already moved on from being a bounded set. However, is it advisable to take the structure to the other extreme within the context of the religious communities of Lebanon? I believe that the Lebanese Baptist Church can develop its own model that incorporates components from both bounded and centered sets. Possibly a centered set with some boundaries, porous boundaries that are designed to invite people in rather than keep people out?

The Missional Church Conversation can provide a fitting challenge to the Lebanese Baptist Church in the area of discipleship. While discipleship for the Lebanese Baptist Church is informal and random, for the Missional Church it is a deliberate corporate task. A culture of discipleship is core in the understanding elaborated by the Missional Church Conversation, life-long discipleship. The growth of the Lebanese Baptist Church is exposing the need for more and better discipleship. Corporate discipleship that not just informs but also involved members is becoming essential for the life of the Lebanese Baptist Church, and certainly for its mission.

### *Role of the Holy Spirit*

The Lebanese Baptist Church recognizes that the work of the Spirit is behind everything that takes place in a church community. However, this is not always talked about, brought to the surface, or well explained. At the time of the field research, the role of the Holy Spirit leading the community was absent from the awareness of the community as they found it difficult to identify and recognize this leading. Implicitly, the Lebanese Baptist Church recognized the leading of the Holy Spirit where there was unity, harmony, and consensus to the decisions made by the local church. Since the hub of decision-making and direction in the Lebanese Baptist Church lies at the top of the hierarchy, the leadership of the Spirit is directly connected with whether there is a Spirit-filled man at the top of the hierarchy. The Spirit's leading is mainly through giving direction and vision through the top leader.

The thinking of the Lebanese Baptist Church changed in two areas since the field research. The first is through theological education that helped make the connection between the leading of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts given to all the members of the community. This connection was not present before. Not much teaching at the churches addressed the gifting of the Holy Spirit. The other area of

change was due to the multiple crises and the churches' response. Members of the Lebanese Baptist Church acknowledge that the transformation that has taken place and that has prompted its crisis response could not have been accomplished through human effort. It must be that the Holy Spirit is behind this transformation.

The Missional Church Conversation, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit and describes it in a multitude of ways, all of them leading to an understanding that the ministry of a missional church is contingent on the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads and teaches the church. Missional people walk in the Spirit and are led and empowered by the Spirit. Specifically, the church exhibits its dependence on the Spirit through corporate prayer. The Spirit empowers the community, the entire community and not just a few. Believers can imitate Christ only as they participate in the work of the Spirit, *missio Dei*.

The Missional Church Conversation presents a framework that is designated as *pneumocracy*, a *pneumocratic* form of church governance. I find this framework helpful as it offers practical ways to think about and implement a rather vague theological concept.

*Pneumocracy* is the rule of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives diverse leadership spiritual girts to the leaders of the local church and leads through them. The key leadership spiritual gifts, according to the Missional Church Conversation are those listed in Ephesians 4:11, apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching. This shifts the view of leadership from the omni-gifted solo leader model to that of a multi-gifted team of leaders. This assumes a wider base of leaders at the local church. *Pneumocracy* does not necessarily oppose having a leader among leaders. Rather, it promotes power sharing among multiple leaders even within a hierarchy.

In a *pneumocracy*, the Holy Spirit does not only reveal his will to the leader at the top. The Holy Spirit is active in the lives of all believers, especially those who are attuned to his voice and spend hours in prayer and Scripture. Therefore, the role of the leaders in the Church is not to speak on behalf of the congregation and make all decisions unilaterally. Rather, the role of the leaders is mainly that of discernment, discerning what God is doing and how he is speaking through the congregation. Vision, in a *pneumocracy* is not revealed to the leader and communicated to the Church. Rather, vision is discovered by the leaders by listening to what God is doing through the congregation.

In a *pneumocracy*, the Holy Spirit works in the entire congregation through the spiritual gifts that he has endowed each member. For example, in shaping ministries of mercy at the Church, the leaders need to specifically listen to the members whose spiritual gift of mercy is particularly evident. God may use these gifted members to lead the Church in the area of mercy. Spiritual gifts are given to the entire congregation, and the role of the leaders is to discover those gifts, enhance them, equip them, and listen to them.

My experience, especially through my time at the Middle East Baptist Church, proved to me that a proper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit is important for a missional journey of a congregation. The notion of *pneumocracy* might seem threatening at first to the leaders of the Lebanese Baptist Church. Power sharing might be threatening to those in power. It need not be. Power sharing can strengthen the whole structure rather than weaken the top. New skills, however, would need to be acquired for leaders to be able to lead effectively within such a framework. Teaching would have to focus on spiritual gifts, and perhaps workshops given so that members can discover their gifts and how God might use them.

An understanding of how spiritual gifts function would need to change in the Lebanese Baptist Church. When the focus of ministry was mostly internal, spiritual gifts were not taught. Why would a church want to discover that several members have the gift of teaching, for example, if the church has only one pulpit? However, when the focus of the Church turns outward and the gifts are mainly used for external ministries, then discovering the gifts and sharpening them becomes a priority.

### *Ethics*

The Lebanese Baptist Church expects good Christian behavior from its members. This mainly means conformity to the prevalent norms and practices that are established by the community. Certain attitudes or traits are expected, such as love, compassion, and a life of prayer. However, when examining the area of discipline in the church, these are not the traits, or lack of them, that are considered for discipline. Rather, it is usually behavioral misalignment with the expected norms that would cause discipline.

When I grew up in this Baptist community, what characterized a believer was mostly appearance and conformity. The fact that the field research revealed that attitudes are getting more attention, this shows a major shift in what the Lebanese Baptist Church believes should be characteristic of its members.

The Lebanese Baptist Church understands its role of being salt and light to its host community. Yet at the time of the research, it largely functioned as a bounded set with clear and rigid boundaries. These boundaries kept a separation between the inside and the outside of the church community. At the time, and as a result of the demographic changes resulting from the civil war of 1975-1990, members of the Lebanese Baptist Church drove from a distance to meet in a church building that is not part of the community in which they lived. The location of the church building did

not define a local geographic community for the local church. This made it difficult for the church community to have any kind of common collective strategy for reaching their surrounding neighborhood. Being salt and light became more of an individual attempt rather than a corporate venture.

The recent crises compelled the Lebanese Baptist Church to abandon its *resignation reaction* in favor of an *engagement reaction*. The churches that got actively involved in caring for refugees shifted most of their resources in that direction. They became welcoming and embracing communities. However, this solidified the posture of the church that serves internally, even within an engagement paradigm. Ministry needs inside the church increased overwhelmingly, so all resources were directed internally. This posed a challenge. The Lebanese Baptist Church was serving Muslim Syrian refugee communities. Consequently, the refugees flocked inside the church buildings, because they are being served and because of the relationships built. This meant that the Lebanese Baptist Church was able to reach a good number of Syrian Muslims because they came into the church community. They were able to hear the Gospel message. However, the Lebanese Baptist Church was not going outside its walls, and Lebanese Muslims were not coming in. So, reaching Lebanese Muslims, even if they happen to be part of the neighboring community, was not taking place.

This again changed in 2020 after the uprisings, the pandemic, and the August blast. The Lebanese Baptist Church turned outwards and started to focus more on the needs and the suffering of all their neighbors, regardless of nationality or religion. The Lebanese Baptist Church is discovering its connection with and responsibility for its surrounding society. This change took place organically as the Lebanese Baptist

Church responded to God's prompting of serving others. This is also being affirmed theologically by leaders who were exposed to theological education.

The Missional Church Conversation provides a solid Kingdom ethic that can help provide a theological framework for what is already changing within the Lebanese Baptist Church. A central part of this Kingdom ethic is in the areas of loving the other, respecting the other, and living out with compassion and kindness. Loving the other who is different from us does not come naturally, especially when the other does not love us back or is sometimes hostile towards us. I grew up in this Baptist community and I grew up lacking love or concern for the other. God has been transforming our attitudes. Theological reinforcement of these concerns through consistent Scriptural teaching and preaching can be helpful for effective missional and incarnational ministry.

In addition, as the Lebanese Baptist Church adopts a *missio Dei* understanding of its role in the world, it will be compelled to grapple with its connection with the society. If the Church is called to live out its witness in the world, serving its society, then the connection points with the society need to be identified. It will be helpful for the Lebanese Baptist local churches to think about shaping themselves as community churches where each local church gathers in the same community where its members live and work. The criteria that members use to choose which local church they want to belong to will consequently have to change. If the role of the Church is to be a witness to its community, then joining a neighborhood church may become more sensible than joining a distant church, despite the members' particular denominational affinity or personal relationships.

## *Towards a Contextual Missional Ecclesiology*

As discussed above, the Lebanese Baptist Church has evolved in its missional practices in the last ten years. However, theological reflection and theoretical foundation did not always accompany the changes. My objective in this section is to summarize the discussion above to suggest a theological foundation that can serve as a platform for discussion as the Lebanese Baptist Church rethinks its ecclesiology. The following is a summative list that is neither definitive nor exhaustive.

The Lebanese Baptist Church is a community of redeemed people on mission with God in the world. The Lebanese Baptist Church participates in the *missio Dei*. Mission is the essence of the Church and not merely an additional program or activity. The Lebanese Baptist Church is a sent-out community.

Every member of the Lebanese Baptist Church is a minister and a missionary in the world on behalf of the Church. The location of ministry is outside the four walls of the Church, in every circle of influence of every member. Mission is the concern of every member and not just the ordained or the commissioned professional.

The Lebanese Baptist Church believes and practices the priesthood of all believers. This means that the community has a priesthood role, and every member of the community participates in this priesthood. There is no gap between the clergy and the laity. Every member of the Lebanese Baptist Church is a minister, some in a church-based capacity and others in a marketplace-based, a workplace-based, a community-based, or even home-based capacity.

The Lebanese Baptist Church defines its existence in the *being*, *doing*, and *agency*. The Lebanese Baptist Church exists as a community, on mission, and as an agent of the Kingdom in the world.

The Lebanese Baptist Church functions as an organism and not an organization. The Lebanese Baptist Church remains flexible to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, adjusting structures, programs, and activities in order to remain faithful to God's calling.

The Lebanese Baptist Church believes that the Gospel is good news to the poor, the captives, and the oppressed. The Gospel is the identity, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the Good News is its saving significance. The Gospel is a communal affair and has a social dimension. The Lebanese Baptist Church practices integral mission, proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed.

The Lebanese Baptist Church is concerned with Kingdom affairs, interested in Kingdom growth rather than local church growth. The Lebanese Baptist Church measures its growth by how many members are equipped and released for ministry rather than how many members are retained.

The Lebanese Baptist Church is led by multiple leaders who have a missional impulse. The leaders of the Lebanese Baptist Church have the collective spiritual gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching. The role of the leaders is not to do the work of the ministry but to equip the members to do the work of the ministry. The leaders are players/coaches.

The Lebanese Baptist Church practices empowerment with decentralized decision-making. The leaders have the task of discernment of what God is saying through the members.

The Lebanese Baptist Church is *pneumocratic*, ruled by the Holy Spirit through the various gifts endowed to the members of the community.

The Lebanese Baptist Church sets apart its leaders through the laying-on of hands and sets apart members of the community for ministry in their context also through the laying-on of hands.

The Lebanese Baptist Church adopts a Kingdom ethic, drawing its values from the Kingdom, understands the signs of the Kingdom and lives them out in the world.

The Lebanese Baptist Church recognizes that it exists for the sake of the world and reaches out to its neighbors in order to proclaim the Gospel among them through missional and incarnational ministries.

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I used the Missional Church Conversation as a theological and theoretical tool as a conversation partner with the Lebanese Baptist Church. The Lebanese Baptist Church has come a long way in its practices since the field research as a result of multiple crises and the effect of theological education. As the praxis of the Lebanese Baptist Church evolved, the theological backing did not follow. The Lebanese Baptist Church is currently too preoccupied with serving to be able to step back and reflect theologically. However, this chapter proposes that the Missional Church Conversation can provide helpful language, affirmation, and inspiration for more change within the Lebanese Baptist Church.

# Chapter Six: Conclusion

The main research question that I set out to answer in this dissertation is how might a North American missional theoretical construct serve as a theological tool to help, if at all, the Lebanese Baptist Church gain a vision for missional engagement in a Lebanese context, and what can a contextual missional ecclesiology look like and what is needed to help the Lebanese Baptist Church live fully into it?

The Lebanese Baptist Church has adapted considerably in its praxis as a result of the recent crises. The response to the needs around the church have significantly altered its lived ecclesiology. However, the Lebanese Baptist Church has not had the opportunity yet to articulate a revised ecclesiology that describes the lived reality or prescribes a way forward. The Missional Church Conversation has served as a valuable theological tool that suggests new language to describe the Lebanese Baptist Church's new realities and inspires a continued journey towards more missional engagement. In addition, I have offered a platform for a new contextual missional ecclesiology conversation to take place within the Baptist community along with some contextual considerations for implementation.

The following is a condensed summary of the development of the Lebanese Baptist Church's ecclesiology according to the seven categories researched in this dissertation. The first column represents the Lebanese Baptist Church's thinking at the time of the field research. The second column goes beyond where the Lebanese Baptist Church is today and projects the ecclesiology that this dissertation offers for the future.

| **Mission** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| Mission is the work of the commissioned professional<br>Mission is accomplished mostly in internal and invitational activities<br>Mission is expressed in Christian lifestyle for everyone | *Missio Dei* is the normative paradigm for mission<br>Mission is the work of every member of the congregation<br>Mission happens outside the four walls of the church<br>Mission is expressed in incarnational ministries |

| **Church** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| The main purpose of the church is in its *being*<br>The church's strength is in shepherding<br>The church acts as an organization | The purpose of the church is expressed in its *being*, *doing*, and *agency*<br>The church's strength is in apostleship<br>The church acts as an organism<br>The church is a sent-out community |

| **Growth and Reproduction** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| Growth is the natural outcome of doing ministry<br>The church is experiencing minimal growth<br>No success metrics | Growth and reproduction are intentional and planned<br>Growth is measured by members released for ministry |

| **Leadership** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| Leadership base is narrow<br>Power concentrated at the top<br>Decision-making is centralized<br>Leaders are the ministers | Leadership base is wide<br>Power is distributed<br>Decision-making is decentralized<br>Leaders are the coaches |

| **Proclamation and Discipleship** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| The church acts as a bounded set<br>The Gospel is mainly verbal proclamation<br>Discipleship is informal and random | The church acts as a centered set<br>The Gospel is multi-faceted – integral mission<br>Discipleship is formal and planned |

| **Role of the Holy Spirit** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| The Holy Spirit leads, somehow | The church is *pneumocratic* |

| **Ethics** | |
|---|---|
| Past Ecclesiology | Proposed Ecclesiology |
| The church is disconnected from its neighborhood | The church adopts a Kingdom ethic<br>The members are agents of the Kingdom<br>The church serves its surrounding society |

## *Concluding Words*

As I researched the missional impulse of the Lebanese Baptist Church, I developed a high sense of appreciation for these churches and their leaders. They have remained faithful to God in a challenging context and many times with minimal training and resources. In conversation with the Missional Church Conversation, all the missional elements and practices that were already in place or were being shaped locally were brought to the surface. As well, this has helped identify gaps that if addressed may motivate the churches to become more missional. The Missional Church Conversation was instrumental in highlighting principles and practices. The implementation of these in a Lebanese context will vary from that in a Western context.

The outcome of my research provides a direct response to my initial hypothesis that the Missional Church Conversation from the West can inform ministry

in a Lebanese context. The last ten years already prove that ministry in a Lebanese context can start a journey towards becoming missional as defined by the literature. A lot of missional principles and practices were being introduced by the churches in response to the recent challenges. My research affirms that indeed the Western Missional Church Conversation, as a theological tool, can inform and influence the thinking and praxis of the local Lebanese Baptist churches.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

### *Impact of Ongoing Crises*

Lebanon is still currently in a state of flux. So is the state of the Lebanese Baptist churches. The changes that are taking place in this context are only the beginning. Ministry in Lebanon today looks much different than it did ten years ago. It has transformed in many dimensions. In this research, I was able to assess some of the Lebanese Baptist Church's responses and how they have shaped it. This research was done during a specific period of time. The recent uprisings in Lebanon started in late 2019 and are still not resolved; The coronavirus pandemic started in 2020 and it will likely take another year before it comes to an end; And the implications of the Beirut explosion of 4 August 2002 will last for months and years. The Lebanese Baptist Church's response is still ongoing. These unceasing crises will no doubt have profound impact on church life and ministry in Lebanon. As history continues to unfold, further research can be helpful in assessing the impact of all these changes a few years into the future. It will also be productive for future research to evaluate whether the documented ecclesiology of the Lebanese Baptist Church will become aligned with the ongoing changing practices.

### *North American Missional Journeys*

A lot has been written on the missional church from a North American perspective in the last few decades. Many authors have documented and reflected on the actual journeys of congregations that were intent on becoming more missional, just like I did with my case study on the Middle East Baptist Church.[791] One of the resources of such journeys is *Treasure in Clay Jars*, edited by Lois Barrett.[792] This book was a result of a project of the Gospel and Our Culture Network. Based on the twelve indicators of a missional church established by the network,[793] eight congregations and one cluster of congregations were nominated from North America to be studied and researched using these indicators. Most of the church visits took place in 1999, and the book was published in 2004. The book authors and editor do not claim that these were the most missional churches in North America, but they do claim that "each of these congregations exhibits some missional characteristics and is seeking to move in a missional direction."[794] The book was organized around five patterns of "missional faithfulness", and the stories of these congregations became an inspiration for many others that had the desire to embark on such a missional journey.[795] I was interested in finding out how this theoretical framework survived the test of time and how practical were the theories that were developed. I contacted the book editor in 2016.[796] Barrett confirmed that there were no such follow-up studies conducted on any of these congregations of which she is aware.

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[791] See page 218.
[792] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*.
[793] See Appendix 10 on page 364.
[794] Barrett, ed. *Treasure in Clay Jars*, x.
[795] Middle East Baptist Church was indeed one of these churches that were inspired by the stories of the eight congregations studied by the book project.
[796] Email exchange with the editor of *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness*. Lois Barrett, personal communication with author, 4 September 2016.

I used some of that missional literature to construct my theological tool. There was no research, however, into what happened to these congregations five years later, and ten years later. This would have provided key data for my research. Did these missional characteristics or patterns prove fruitful for ministry? What happened to the journey? Did the congregations advance in their journey? Are they still on that journey? Did they have to modify their thinking about some patterns or practices? What were they and how? A follow-up study can be conducted on some, or all, of these congregations. The outcome of this study may either solidify the position of these congregations as appropriate models that others can learn from or will highlight areas of weaknesses of which others need to be cautious. In addition, it would be very fruitful to document how their theology and praxis have developed during the years.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Questionnaire, 1st Draft, Dec. 26, 2006

# Church Questionnaire

**Name:** **Date:**

**Church:**

**Position at Church:**

☐ Pastor ☐ Lay Leader ☐ Member

**Purpose**

Use this template to capture the key information that you need to develop a thorough marketing strategy. Then use the information that you collect, along with other development tools, to build your key marketing strategy.

This template is divided into the following question sections:

### 1. Vision and Ministries of your Church

A. Can you articulate the vision of your church?

B. Why does your church exist?

C. What are the primary goals of your church?

D. List the main ministries of your church:

E. How do these ministries contribute towards achieving the goals of your church?

## 2. Leadership of the Church

A. Who is (are) the leader(s) of the church?

B. Describe the leadership style in your church:

C. How do the members respond to the leadership in the church?

### 3. Overall Ministry Assessment

A. What are the main strengths of your church?

B. What are the main weaknesses of your church?

C. Do you think your church is fulfilling its God-given role?

D. What are the barriers to making the church ministry more effective?

## 4. Your Own Ministry in the Church

A. What are your primary spiritual gifts?

B. Describe your own church ministry:

C. Are you getting guidance and equipping in using your spiritual gifts in ministry?

D. What are the barriers to making your ministry more effective?

## 5. Vocation

A. Do you have a clear sense of your own vocation and calling?

B. Do you get guidance at church in how to find your calling?

C. Does your church teach you how to deal with workplace issues?

# Appendix 2 – Questionnaire, 2nd Draft, May 7, 2007

Elie Haddad

## The Baptist Church in Lebanon - Survey

Version 0.0

May 7, 2007

Date: _____

Name: _____

Church: _____

Position in Church: ☐ Pastor ☐ Leader ☐ Member

Age: ☐ 20-30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 40-50 ☐ Above 50

## I. Missional

1. What do you understand by "mission"?

2. Who does it?

3. Where is it done?

4. How is it done?

## II. Church

1. What is the "Church"?

2. What is(are) its purpose(s)?

3. What does your church do to fulfill its mission?

4. How is your church organized?

5. What is the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God?

## III. Growth and Reproduction

1. How does your church encourage growth and reproduction?

2. To what extent do you believe it is successful?

3. How do you measure it?

## IV. Leadership

1. *Who are the* leaders *of the church?*

2. *What are their primary responsibilities?*

3. *How do they lead?*

4. *How are decisions made?*

## V. Proclamation/Discipleship

1. We are called to proclaim the Gospel. What does that mean? What is the Gospel?

2. How is it proclaimed?

3. How are disciples made?

## VI. Role of the Holy Spirit

1. How does the Holy Spirit work in and through the Church?

2. In particular, how does He lead?

## VII. Ethics

1. What do you think characterizes a believer? Why?

2. Do you think there are particular behaviors and attitudes which should characterize a believer? If so, what? Why? If not, why not?

3. Do you think there are any behaviors and attitudes that a believer should avoid? If so, what? Why? If not, why not?

4. What should be the relationship between the Church and the surrounding society?

# Appendix 3 – Final Questionnaire, June 11, 2007

Elie Haddad

## The Baptist Church in Lebanon - Survey

Version 0.1

June 11, 2007

Date: _____

Name: _____

Church: _____

Position in Church: ☐ Pastor ☐ Leader ☐ Member

Age: ☐ 20-30 ☐ 30-40 ☐ 40-50

☐ Above 50

## I. Mission

5. What do you understand by "mission"?

6. Who does it?

7. Where is it done?

8. How is it done?

## II. Church

6. What is the "Church"?

7. What is (are) its purpose(s)?

8. What does your church do to fulfill its mission?

9. How is your church organized?

10. What is the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God?

## III. Growth and Reproduction

4. How does your church encourage growth and reproduction?

5. To what extent do you believe it is successful?

6. How do you measure it?

## IV. Leadership

5. Who are the leaders of the church?

6. How are the leaders appointed or how do they emerge?

7. How does your church equip new leaders?

8. When do the leaders stop leading or how are they removed?

9. What are their primary responsibilities?

10. How do they lead?

11. How are decisions made?

## V. Proclamation/Discipleship

4. We are called to proclaim the Gospel. What does that mean? What is the Gospel?

5. How is it proclaimed?

6. How are disciples made?

## VI. Role of the Holy Spirit

3. How does the Holy Spirit work in and through the Church?

_____

_____

_____

4. In particular, how does He lead?

_____

_____

_____

## VII. Ethics

5. What do you think characterizes a believer? Why?

6. Do you think there are particular behaviors and attitudes which should characterize a believer? If so, what? Why? If not, why not?

7. Do you think there are any behaviors and attitudes that a believer should avoid? If so, what? Why? If not, why not?

8. What should be the relationship between the Church and the surrounding society?

# Appendix 4 – Observation Form

## ملاحظات حول الكنيسة

الإسم: _____
الكنيسة: _____
التاريخ: _____

## هندسة مبنى الكنيسة

شكل القاعة الداخلي، المنبر، المقاعد، الباب الرئيسي، شكل المبنى الخارجي

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

## البيئة والتنظيم الداخلي

من يشارك في الخدمة، من يأخذ أدوار على المنبر، مدى مشاركة الحضور، كيفية استقبال الضيوف، راحة المكان (معنويًا وجسديًا)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

# Appendix 5 – Coding of Qualitative Data

**Q.I.1 What do you understand by "mission"?**

| | |
|---|---|
| FUNCTION | A function of the Church |
| FULLFILL_PLAN | Fulfill God's plan, missio Dei |
| GREAT_COMMAND | The Great Commandment |
| GREAT_COMMISS | The Great Commission |
| PROC_GOSPEL | Proclaim the Gospel |
| REACH_OTHERS | Reach others |
| RECONCILIATION | Reconciliation of mankind with God |
| LIFESTYLE | Mission as lifestyle |
| NATURE | The nature of the Church |

**Q.I.2 Mission – who does it?**

| | |
|---|---|
| EVERYONE | Every believer |
| SPECIALIZED | The pastor, the commissioned, the ordained |

**Q.I.3 Mission – where is it done?**

| | |
|---|---|
| ALL_SPHERES | All spheres of influence |
| INSIDE | Inside the church |
| OUTSIDE | Outside the church |

**Q.I.4 Mission – how is it done?**

| | |
|---|---|
| CELL_GROUPS | Home cell groups |
| INSIDE | Inside the church |
| DISCIPLESHIP | Discipleship within the church |
| EVAN_MEETING | Evangelistic meetings |
| MINISTRY | Involvement in church ministry |
| PRAYER | Prayer, seeking God |
| SUNDAY_SCHOOL | Sunday School |
| TEACH_PREACH | Teaching and preaching |
| TRAINING | Training and equipping for ministry |
| OUTSIDE | Outside the church |
| VISITATION | Evangelistic visitations |
| COLLABORATION | Collaboration with other ministries/churches |
| COMM_INVOLVE | Community involvement |
| HOLISTIC | Holistic ministry outside |
| LIFESTYLE | Lifestyle |
| PLANTING | Planting other churches or starting ministries |
| PROCLAIM_WORD | Proclamation of the word |
| SENDING | Sending out missionaries/evangelists in the traditional sense |
| SOCIAL | Social proclamation |

**Q.II.1 What is the "church"?**

| | |
|---|---|
| BEING | The church as a "being" |
| DOING | The church as a "doing" body |
| INSTRUMENT | The church as an instrument |

**Q.II.2 What are its purposes?**

| | |
|---|---|
| EDIFICATION | Building the body, serving the body, discipleship |
| FULFILL_PLAN | Fulfill God's plan, agent of God, catalyst |
| SERVICE | Serving others, loving others, reaching others |
| WITNESS | Witness or proclamation |
| WORSHIP | Worship or glorify God |

**Q.II.3 What does your church do to fulfill its mission?**

| | |
|---|---|
| COMM_INVOLVE | Encouraging community involvement |
| CONGR_CARE | Maintenance and congregational care |
| DISCIPLESHIP | Encouraging disicpleship and growth |
| EQUIP | Equipping and training |
| HOME_GROUPS | Encouraging home groups or cell groups |
| MINISTRY | Providing members avenues for various ministries |
| PREACH_TEACH | Preach and teach |
| PROGRAMS | Church programs |

**Q.II.4 How is the church organized?**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEC_MAKING | General decision-making style |
| INCLUSIVE | Decision-making more towards inclusive |
| TOP_DOWN | Decision-making more towards top down |
| INVOLVEMENT | Degree of involvement by congregation |
| HIGH_INVOLV | High involvement in church |
| LOW_INVOLV | Low involvement in church |
| LEADERSHIP | General leadership style |
| PLURALITY | Leadership style more towards plurality |
| SOLO | Leadership style more towards solo |
| STRUCTURE | General structure |
| ORGANISM | Structure tends towards organism |
| ORGANIZATION | Structure tends towards organization |

**Q.II.5 What is the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God?**

| | |
|---|---|
| AGENCY | Church as agent or representative of the Kingdom of God |
| PARTICIPATION | Church as participation in the Kingdom of God, a foretaste |
| WITNESS | Church as witness to the Kingdom of God |

**Q.III.1 How does your church encourage growth and reproduction?**

| | |
|---|---|
| CONGR_CARE | By caring for the congregation, including visitation |
| DISCIPLESHIP | Mentoring, discipleship, coaching, ... |
| EMPOWERMENT | Empowering others in ministry |
| EQUIP | Equipping and training |
| EVANGELISM | By doing evangelism, inside and outside, including visitation |
| HOME_GROUPS | By encouraging home groups |
| INVOLVEMENT | Involvement in ministry |
| PLANT_CHURCH | By planting churches |
| PRAYER | Corporate prayer |
| TEACH/PREACH | By teaching and preaching |

**Q.III.2 To what extent do you believe it is successful?**

| | |
|---|---|
| MODERATELY | Moderately successful |
| NEW_JOURNEY | Just started on a new journey |
| NOT | Not successful |
| VERY | Very successful |

**Q.III.3 How do you measure it?**

| | |
|---|---|
| GIVING | Giving or funding |
| HOME_GROUPS | Growth of home groups is a sign of growth of church |
| INVOLVEMENT | Success measured by how involved the members are in the ministries of the church |
| LIFESTYLE | Success measured by the lifestyle of the congregation, fruits |
| NEW_BLOOD | New people coming |
| NUMBERS | Success measured quantitatively by numbers |
| SELF_ASSESS | Self assessment |

**Q.IV.1 Who are the leaders of the church?**

| | |
|---|---|
| FUNCTIONAL | Functional leaders |
| GIFTS | Those who use their spiritual gifts in their ministries |
| INFLUENCE | A sense that people of influence are the recognized leaders |
| MISSIONAL | Those leading missional activities or ministries are recognized as leaders |
| PASTOR | The pastor is the single leader |
| POSITIONAL | Positional leaders |

**Q.IV.2 How are these leaders appointed or how do they emerge?**

| | |
|---|---|
| APPOINTED | Appointed by leader/committee |
| ELECTED | They are elected by the church |
| INITIATIVE | They emerge by their own initiatives in ministry |
| RECOGNIZED | Recognized at early stage based on skills, gifts, character, ministry experience |

**Q.IV.3 How does your church equip new leaders?**

| | |
|---|---|
| FORMAL_INTEN | Formal intentional training: workshops, seminars, courses |
| FORMAL_RAND | Formal training: workshops, seminars, courses - random rather than intentional |
| INFORM_INTEN | Informal intentional training: mentoring, coaching, apprenticeship |
| INFORM_RAND | Informal training: mentoring, coaching, apprenticeship - Random rather than intentional |
| NOTHING | No equipping of leaders |

**Q.IV.4 When do the leaders stop leading or how are they removed?**

| | |
|---|---|
| CONFLICT | Leave because of conflict |
| EVALUATION | Removed after evaluation by pastor or leadership team |
| FIXED_TERM | Fixed term |
| INDEFINITE | Leaders are not removed |
| RESIGNATION | Person serving resigns |
| SIN | Removed because of sin |

**Q.IV.5 What are their primary responsibilities?**

| | |
|---|---|
| DOING | Responsible to be a doer |
| EQUIPPING | Responsible to equip |
| LEADING | Responsible to lead, provide direction |
| LOOKING | Responsible to look for opportunities |
| PRAYING | Responsible to pray for others |

**Q.IV.6 How do they lead?**

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHORITARIAN | Authoritarian leadership style |
| EMPOWER | A culture of empowerment |
| MODEL | Lead by modeling, providing example |
| OBSERVATION | Leaders only observe |

**Q.IV.7 How are decisions made?**

| | |
|---|---|
| CONGREG | Congregational decisions |
| CONSULTATION | Decisions are made by consultation |
| EMPOWERMENT | Ministry leaders are empowered to make decisions |
| TEAM_DECISION | Decision by leadership team or ministry team |
| TOP_DOWN | Decisions are made top down |

**Q.V.1 What does the Gospel mean? What is the Gospel?**

| | |
|---|---|
| HOLISTIC | Holistic good news |
| KOG_EXPAND | Kingdom of God expanding |
| RESTORATION | Gospel is restoration |
| SALVATION | Gospel is salvation |
| SOCIAL | Social Gospel is integral part |
| SOCIAL_DEP | Social Gospel is second to evangelism |

**Q.V.2 How is the Gospel proclaimed?**

| | |
|---|---|
| DISCIPLING | Discipling |
| EVANGELISATION | Evangelization |
| MODELING | Modeling / living out |
| SOCIAL | Caring for the poor, ... |
| TEACH_PREACH | Teaching / preaching |

**Q.V.3 How are disciples made?**

| | |
|---|---|
| APPRENTICE | Apprenticeship, formal or informal |
| MENTORING | Mentoring, intentional |
| MODELING | Modeling, informal |
| PREACH_TEACH | Through preaching / teaching, informally |
| SELF_DISCIPLED | Discipleship is one's own responsibility, through self-study and ministry |
| SMALL_GROUPS | Formal small groups |
| TRAINING | Formal training seminars / workshops |

**Q.VI.1 How does the Holy Spirit work in and through the church?**

| | |
|---|---|
| CONVICTS | Convicts the people in the church |
| GIFTEDNESS | Ministry by giftedness |
| GOD_CENTER | God is the one drawing people and growing them |
| PRAYER | Ministry powered by prayer |
| SCRIPTURE | Ministry focused on the word of God |
| THRU_PASTOR | The Holy Spirit works through the pastor |

**Q.VI.2 How does the Holy Spirit lead?**

| | |
|---|---|
| CONCENSUS | By consensus in the church / unity |
| HARMONY | By harmony among leaders |
| THRU_ALL | The Holy Spirit leads through anyone in the church |

# Appendix 6 – ABTS Competencies Annual Evaluation

**Name:** _____

**Introduction:**

This evaluation is designed to help you reflect on your own **personal growth** over the course of this last year. This is **not** an evaluation of the individual courses or teachers, but rather of your own growth through the experience of study, ministry, and spiritual formation.

You will be provided with a copy of your completed self-evaluation. Please keep it on file.

At the conclusion of each year you will be asked to, again, complete this form. The accumulated forms will provide you with a tool to track your personal formation.

**Instructions:**

With each category, please check the appropriate box. Please add written comments with each section to provide yourself with a written record of your reflections on your own personal growth or lack thereof.

In each case the meaning of the categories are as follows:

- ***Very strong***: You feel that you have a high level of competency in this area. You are confident that you would be able to teach and train others in this area.
- ***Strong***: You feel comfortable working in this area. There are still areas you feel you would like to learn more, but you have a strong general ability in the area.
- ***Good***: You have a good working ability in this area, but see a number of major gaps that you feel need to be addressed.
- ***Fair***: You have an introductory level of ability, but there are many gaps and areas of weakness.
- ***Poor***: Your ability is very rudimentary. There is a great need for growth in this area
- ***Very Poor***: Your knowledge and/or ability are almost totally non-existent in this area. You long to see significant growth.

**I. Cognitively a Mind Committed to Reflective Practice:** Able to interpret Christian life and ministry through the multiple lenses of Scripture, Theology, History, and Community.

**A. Biblical Competencies**

| | Very Strong | Strong | Good | Fair | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge of the content of Old Testament books | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of the content of New Testament books | | | | | | |
| Understanding the major themes and issues in Old Testament theology | | | | | | |
| Understanding the major themes and issues in New Testament theology | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of the history of Israel | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of the history of the early church | | | | | | |
| Understanding standard approaches and methods related to biblical exegesis | | | | | | |
| Understanding some major approaches and issues in hermeneutics | | | | | | |

**General comments:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Particular areas in which you would like to grow:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**B. Historical-Theological Competencies**

| | Very Strong | Strong | Good | Fair | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge and understanding of central Christian doctrines | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of the general flow of church history. | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of the eastern church history. | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of Protestant church history. | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of the world and Middle Eastern history and how it has impacted church history. | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of key theological thinkers in church history. | | | | | | |
| Understanding of how theology has emerged historical from the context of the theologian | | | | | | |
| Able to develop a personal contextual theology | | | | | | |

**General comments:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Particular areas in which you would like to grow:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**C. Sociological-Cultural Competencies**

| | Very Strong | Strong | Good | Fair | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge and understanding of the nature and impact of culture. | | | | | | |
| Able to evaluate culture in light of a Christian worldview | | | | | | |
| Knowledge and understanding of the history, doctrine, and practices of Islam | | | | | | |
| Able to evaluate both positively and negatively the influence of Islam on Middle Eastern society. | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of the basic elements of psychological theory and its relevance for Christian ministry | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of the basic elements of sociological theory and its relevance for Christian ministry | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of the basic elements of cultural anthropology and its relevance for Christian ministry | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of the basic elements of political theory and its relevance for Christian ministry | | | | | | |

**General comments:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Particular areas in which you would like to grow:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**D. Personal-Ministerial Competencies**

| | Very Strong | Strong | Good | Fair | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A critical understanding of the psychological and spiritual processes by which people grow in personal and corporate settings. | | | | | | |
| The ability to interpret key ministerial issues through the multiple lenses of Bible, history, theology, and context: | | | | | | |
| (a) Christian leadership | | | | | | |
| (b) Church planting and church growth | | | | | | |
| (c) The teaching ministry of the church | | | | | | |
| (d) Christian nurture and discipleship | | | | | | |
| (e) Christian counseling | | | | | | |
| (f) Preaching | | | | | | |

**General comments:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Particular areas in which you would like to grow:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**II. Affectively a Heart of Love for God and Others:** Able to be examples of maturing faith in relationship with God, and in a commitment to reconciled relationships and restored communities

**Affective Competencies**

| | Very Strong | Strong | Good | Fair | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A deep love for God's people and a desire to see the Church of Jesus Christ live out its missional calling. | | | | | | |
| A vital, daily relationship with Jesus Christ, seen in the discipline of regular practices of worship, spiritual renewal, and personal growth. | | | | | | |
| Growing evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. | | | | | | |
| A deepening ability to hear God's word in stillness and solitude | | | | | | |
| Honor all persons as created in the image of God by appreciating the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and traditions within the church. | | | | | | |
| Clear sense of calling in ministry, and a sober confidence that this calling is from God | | | | | | |
| Knowledge of gifts and knows how to develop these gifts | | | | | | |
| Willing and able to evaluate one's own spiritual development and practices, noting areas of both strength and weakness. | | | | | | |
| Engaged in accountable relationships focused on spiritual growth. | | | | | | |
| Blameless in the eyes of the local church | | | | | | |
| Stewardship of time, with a wise balance between | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| God, family, Church, and society. | | | | | | |
| Stewardship of body: regular exercise. | | | | | | |
| Stewardship of finances. | | | | | | |
| Solid practices of personal order and discipline in place. | | | | | | |
| Commitment to faithfulness and integrity in ministry responsibilities; people can trust and depend on me. | | | | | | |

**General comments:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Particular areas in which you would like to grow:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**III. Behaviourally Hands of Servant Leadership for the Empowering of God's people:** Able to equip faithful men and women in the Church for effective service

**Behavioural Competencies**

| | Very Strong | Strong | Good | Fair | Poor | Very Poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Able to create a leadership environment that is characterized by missional strategic vision and direction. | | | | | | |
| Able to create a leadership environment that is characterized by team leadership and empowerment. | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Able to create a leadership environment that is characterized by redemptive action. | | | | | | |
| Able to gather and assess demographic, social, economic and cultural information in order to inform a process of planning and development in a particular ministry context. | | | | | | |
| Able to disciple and mentor others towards Christian maturity. | | | | | | |
| Able to nurture others through small group ministry. | | | | | | |
| Able to nurture, mentor, and train through formal teaching contexts. | | | | | | |
| Able to nurture others towards Christian maturity through effective preaching. | | | | | | |
| Able to study and teach the scriptures inductively and synthetically, as a basis for responding to contemporary life questions. | | | | | | |
| Able to give a clear, personal witness of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message to various categories of hearers. | | | | | | |
| Able to defend the Christian faith with gentleness and respect. | | | | | | |
| Able to counsel others in the resolution of life issues and discern when to refer counselees to health professionals for psychological or physical care. | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Able to speak, read and write clearly in the Arabic language. | | | | | | |
| Has a working level of English for access to global theological resources and continuing education | | | | | | |

**General comments:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Particular areas in which you would like to grow:**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

# Appendix 7 – Graduate Feedback Interview

**Date:**
**Name of Graduate:**
**Program of Study:**
**Year of Graduation:**

| Question | Response |
|---|---|
| 1. What type of ministry or ministries are they involved in?<br>(Pastoral, Church Planting, Children and Youth Ministries)<br><br>In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of their ministry:<br>In which of the following categories are they involved and what specifically are they doing?<br><br>a. Preaching<br>b. Teaching<br>c. Discipleship, Mentoring, Training<br>d. Ministry to families/children/youth/women<br>e. Church Planting<br>f. Counseling<br>g. Evangelism<br>h. Addressing social needs – of the poor and marginalized (Project Management)<br>i. Conflict management within the church<br>j. Community Restoration<br>k. Church governance, structure, and leadership<br>l. Financial Management<br>m. Ministry to the business world<br><br>Scale 1-5<br>1: Doesn't do<br>3: Does sometimes<br>5: Does regularly | |
| 2. What are two or three of the most important things they learned at ABTS?<br>-How are they using these in their ministry?<br>-How often?<br><br>-What else from ABTS are they using in their ministry? (both Theological & Applied Learning)<br><br>Scale: 1-5<br>1: Rarely using (annually) | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3: Using sometimes (bi-monthly)<br>5: Using regularly (several times per month) | |
| 3. What from ABTS are they not using?<br><br>Scale: 1-3<br>1: Unrelated to their ministry<br>3: Directly related to their ministry<br><br>(-show them list of courses, ask which courses were valuable, which were not, and why.) | |
| 4. What did they wish they had learnt at ABTS?<br><br>Scale: 1-3<br>1: Studied, but desiring more coverage<br>3: Not covered in curriculum studied | |
| 5. How well prepared did they feel at the beginning of their current position?<br><br>What could ABTS do to be more effective in preparing future graduates for similar positions?<br><br>Scale: 1-5<br>1: Completely unprepared<br>3: Moderately prepared<br>5: Extremely well prepared | |
| 6. (if involved in a para-church organization)<br><br>How do they see the relationship between their organization and the local church?<br><br>Scale: 1-3<br>1: Unrelated<br>3: Intrinsically/Strategically linked | |
| 7. What are the main challenges their church/organization and community are facing right now?<br><br>Have they encountered any new issues in the community?<br><br>Scale: 1-5<br>1: Not addressing | |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3: Addressing somewhat; limited effectiveness<br>5: Addressing effectively | |
| 8. Do they use the graduate profile?<br>If so, how often do they reflect on where they are within that ministry roadmap?<br><br>Scale: 1-5<br>1: Doesn't use<br>3: Uses rarely<br>5: Uses regularly | |
| 9. In what ways did ABTS affect their personal sense of calling from God?<br><br>Scale: 1-5<br>1: Didn't affect their sense of calling<br>3: Moderately affected their sense of calling<br>5: Greatly affected their sense of calling | |
| Additional comments/notes: | |

# Appendix 8 – Church/Ministry Focus Group Feedback

**Date:**

**Name of Church/Organization:**

| Question | Response |
|---|---|
| 1. How are ABTS graduates (and students) involved in the church/organization?<br><br>(If possible, list their Name, Program of Study, and Year of Graduation) | |
| 2. If the church/organization were to hire a Christian Worker* today, what qualities would it like them to have?<br>-Attitude<br>-Skills<br>-Knowledge<br><br>To what extent is ABTS producing Christian Workers* with these qualities? | |
| 3. Which of the following categories are important to the church/organization, and which ones are they engaged in?<br><br>a. Preaching<br>b. Teaching<br>c. Discipleship, Mentoring, Training<br>d. Ministry to families/children/youth/women<br>e. Church Planting<br>f. Counseling<br>g. Evangelism<br>h. Addressing social needs – of the poor and marginalized (Project Management)<br>i. Conflict management within the church<br>j. Community Restoration<br>k. Church governance, structure, and leadership<br>l. Financial Management<br>m. Ministry to the business world | |
| 4. What does the church/organization governance/structure look like?<br><br>Where does the Christian Worker* fit within it? | |
| 5. Describe the vision of the church/organization.<br><br>Is there a sense that the church/organization has a common vision? | |

| | |
|---|---|
| In general, how can a Christian Worker* enable a church/organization to accomplish its vision? | |
| 6. What challenges is the church/organization facing?<br>-internal<br>-external | |
| 7. Concluding thoughts:<br>How can ABTS be more effective in training Christian Workers*? | |
| Additional comments/notes: | |

*** "Christian Worker" in this context could be identified as a Pastor, Church Planter, Minister to Children & Youth, House Church Leader, NGO worker, etc.**

# Appendix 9 – Neighborhood Interviews

**Date:**

**Name of Church/Organization:**

| Question | Response |
|---|---|
| 8. Have you heard of this church? (Name of local church where ABTS graduate is serving, or the pastor's name, etc.?) | |
| 9. Have you had any interaction with people from this church? (if yes, give details) | |
| 10. What do you think this church believes? (Why do you think this?) | |
| 11. In general, what should a church's role be in their community?<br><br>What can the church and community do to improve their relationship? | |
| 12. Is the church a positive or negative thing in the society?<br>What could the church do to be a positive thing in the society? | |
| 13. Do you have Christian friends?<br><br>Can you describe them – what are they like? | |
| 14. What do you believe about God? | |
| 15. What comes to mind when you think about<br>a) reconciliation?<br>b) forgiveness?<br>c) acceptance?<br>d) justice?<br>(or any other 'Kingdom Values' talked about in the courses at ABTS) | |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Additional comments/notes: | |

# Appendix 10 – Empirical Indicators of a 'Missional Church'[797]

**1. The missional church proclaims the Gospel.**

What it looks like: *The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of different ways*.

The community's thought, words, and deeds are being formed into a pattern that proclaims the Gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. As a result, the Good News of God.s reign is publicly announced. The proclamation is a "word and deed" proclamation; it is not only audible but visible as well. It is audible in a proclamation that focuses not solely upon the salvation of persons, or the transformation of individual human lives, but also the transformation of the church, human communities, and the whole human community, history, and creation in the coming and already present reign of God. It is visible in, with, and through the quality of a common life that manifests the unique culture-contrasting good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.**

What it looks like: *The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of all.*

Persons are not expected automatically to know the 'way of doing things in the reign of God'. Citizenship in the reign of God is learned. The learned protocol involves primarily those behaviors and processes that witness to the way of Jesus, who is forming his people for life in the reign of God. The community does not simply rely on 'how we've always done things here,' or 'that's how we Baptists/Lutherans/Presbyterians/ Methodists/etc. do it,' or even 'that's how we do it in the company where I work.' Rather, the community seeks critically to integrate already learned practices with skills and habits of Christian discipleship. This community shows evidence of growing, changing, and deepening the skills and habits of discipleship. Nurturing citizenship in the reign of God is an overall priority of the church for all members of the community of faith.

**3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.**

What it looks like: *The church is reading the Bible together to learn what it can learn no where else - God's good and gracious intent for all creation, the salvation mystery, and the identity and purpose of life together.*

There are two commonly held expectations: that we will seek to know the Scriptures, and that we will seek to become obedient to the Word which is revealed in the Scriptures. Listening, reading, studying, and obeying the Bible is integral to all of church life, including its worship, spirituality, service, education, stewardship, and witness. The Bible is engaged communally. The overarching approach to Scripture study in the body is not solely 'personal devotion' or merely 'moral guidance,' but is characterized by the question, 'What is the text saying to the church which is attempting to be faithful today?' 'How does the biblical word prepare God's people for their mission in this particular place?'

**4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.**

What it looks like: *In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.*

Discipleship requires a willingness to follow the way of the cross and share in the sufferings of Christ. The church is not getting its bearings by the world's standard of success-institutional status, power, or influence. Rather, it witnesses to the truth of the Gospel that the one on the cross is the way, the truth, and the life for the church. Jesus models what the church is called to be. Thus the church is called to show hard evidence that as a body of people it provides a collective witness to its crucified savior. The church's distinctive conduct, then, is frequently different from and often in

[797] GOCN, "Empirical Indicators of a 'Missional Church'".

opposition to the world's patterns of behavior. This is particularly evident when the power of love, service, and sacrifice for one another in the community is contrasted with the powers of hate, violence, and domination in the world.

**5. The church seeks to discern God's specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.**

What it looks like: *The church has made its 'mission' its priority, and in overt and communal ways is seeking to be and do 'what God is calling us to know, be, and do.'*

The goal of decision-making is not simply to discover the will of the community, but to discern together the will of God. Because all participants in the body participate in decisions that affect their life and mission together, shared power and influence (rather than status, position, or 'majority opinion') are the keys of authority. The need for the gifts and insights of all members to shape and guide a faithful and effective ministry is recognized and emphasized. Mentors, teachers, and partners provide intentional support, challenge, and advice to enable one another to extend these skills and habits and deepen their participation in the life of Christ. Members make efforts to set aside the necessary time to listen, study, share, struggle, pray, and plan together as they search for God.s will and seek to participate in God's mission. Members pledge to live out together the conclusions they have reached together. Church leadership encourages, guides, teaches, and serves the process of communal discernment through consistently holding the following key questions before the community as they seek together to answer them:

- What is God calling us as this church to be and do?
- How can we enter more faithfully into the reign of God?
- How will we learn from the Bible what it means to be the church?
- How will we more faithfully and effectively practice Christian community in our life with one other?

**6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.**

What it looks like: *Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in the locale characterize the generosity of the community.*

The church exhibits the fruits of the Spirit which include (but are not limited to) not thinking more highly of oneself than one ought; valuing the gifts of others; loving one another with mutual affection; eagerness to show the workings of the Spirit; patience in suffering; hospitality to strangers; blessing those who do not understand, or who persecute; associating with the lowly; not repaying evil for evil, but overcoming evil with good; and living peaceably. Acts of generosity are commonplace and self-giving is a behavioral characteristic of this community.

**7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.**

What it looks like: *The church community is moving beyond homogeneity, toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender and socio-economic make-up.*

The barriers that separate people are identified, addressed, and overcome. Differences and dissension among people are dealt with constructively. Conflict is used to enrich discussion. Evil done within or to the body is overcome by doing good. Healing involves confession to and the forgiveness of one another wherever and whenever wrong exists. This process of healing and reconciliation takes place between individuals and within the body, both of which serve to shape and reform the community as a whole. Society's boundaries are crossed-class, economic status, race, gender, age, occupation, education. Amazingly diverse people allow themselves to be formed by one Lord into one body. Violence is rejected as a method of resolving difference.

**8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.**

What it looks like: *Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.*

They covenant together to uphold and watch over one another in love, praying for one another. They are committed to one another, and that commitment is expressed through collaboration, interdependence of work efforts, and being dependable. People place a high value on sharing a common life and supporting one another.

**9. The church practices hospitality.**

What it looks like: *Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role.*

People are reached and invited into new relationships with God and with one another as the community's intent is to welcome as God welcomes. As a result, people are becoming citizens of God's reign. Having heard and received this invitation themselves, they extend the invitation to others to know and experience God's love.

**10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.**

What it looks like: *There is significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together*.

Worship is the community's action of publicly giving allegiance to God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an act of the whole people of God who remain faithful to tradition while integrating variety which reflects and gives new meaning to the unique cultural context of the congregation. Worship actively engages the community in ways that nurture the dynamic, growing and changing aspects of discipleship in the world. As such, it provides for the incorporation of people into the community of faith, their formation into a new humanity, and their reception of God's gift of sustenance for daily life. Its focus is on celebrating God's presence and promises without seeking or expecting worship to be the occasion for God to meet human needs. The congregation departs from worship, knowing that it is a sent and sending community, and each Christian is conscious of his or her apostolic sentness as light, leaven, and salt in the world.

**11. This community has a vital public witness.**

What it looks like: *The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.*

What the community intends to be and do actually does occur, and is confirmed both by those who participate in the community (e.g. .I have learned here that I can disagree and I don't have to leave.) as well as by those who do not, (e.g.. 'Oh, you're the church that always helps clean up after floods and tornadoes'). Like political ambassadors, persons know and can articulate where their allegiance lies. They know and can articulate the nature and expectations of the mission that has been given to them. Its public deeds do not consist of imposing its moral will on others, but of giving hard evidence of the reign of God that intrudes as an alternative vision and practice in the immediate locale and elsewhere.

**12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.**

What it looks like: *There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere - and that somewhere is more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.*

The church has been given the gift of citizenship in the reign of God which it has received less than perfectly. Knowing that the church is as yet a flawed witness to the reign of God, it is open to its own reformation as it continually seeks to provide a more faithful and more effective witness in its changing context. Therefore, the church is constantly critiquing and intentionally reshaping its vision, common life, teaching, organization, obedience, witness, and ministry on the basis of its hearing of the Word of God.

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